

in sights

FOR A BETTER BUYING EXPERIENCE

FALL ISSUE 2009

Ergonomic Furniture Makes Good Economic Sense

IN THIS ISSUE:
Learn how ergonomic
furniture can keep employees
and profits healthy.



Why Ergonomics Matters

Working in an office environment isn't as risk free as you might think. While office workers might not have the same risk factors as a warehouse or job site, injuries are still common. In most cases, these injuries are preventable and incidences of injury can be reduced just by selecting the right ergonomic furniture.



THE EFFECTS OF ERGONOMICS ON THE BOTTOM LINE

How important is it to consider ergonomic furniture for your office? Very. MSDs – musculoskeletal disorders that can be directly tied to poor ergonomics, and accounts for one-third of all lost workday injuries and illnesses. Physical manifestations of MSDs include a decreased range of motion, a weakened grip, numbness, cramping and more.

Shockingly, MSDs cost businesses \$15 to \$20 billion dollars annually in workers' compensation. And that's not including indirect costs, which could run as high as \$45 to \$60 billion dollars a year.

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WORK FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO MSDS

According to several research studies, the probability of an MSD occurring is even greater when employees are exposed to more than one risk factor. Specific work-related risk factors that have been identified as causes of MSDs are:

- Poor posture
- Excessive force
- Repetitive work habits
- Contact stress/pressure
- Vibrations
- Environment (extreme hot or cold temperatures, noise, etc.)

While it's been found that age, gender, obesity and other personal factors can contribute to the development of MSDs, it's hard to deny certain working conditions only exacerbate them.

CHANGES THAT CAN MAKE A POSITIVE IMPACT

The most cost-effective approach to reducing MSDs is to be proactive and implement ergonomic solutions before problems arise.

Surprisingly, resolving ergonomic issues can be quite simple and inexpensive to do. Whether you're making a new furniture purchase, or reassigning existing furniture, here's a few ideas to consider when it comes to:

SEATING

- Choose a chair with excellent lumbar support that allows for a reclined posture of 100 – 110 degrees. This will significantly decrease the pressure put on an employee's spine and lower back.
- Select a chair with a cushioned seat. It helps distribute weight evenly for greater comfort throughout the day. Be aware that low-density foam can become permanently

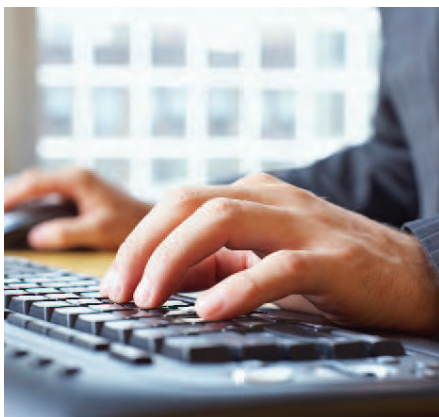


deformed and inadequate cushioned support can cause discomfort, imbalance, and hip and back fatigue.

- Make sure chairs have armrests, which can reduce arm fatigue and aid employees in getting in and out of their chair.
- Look for armrests that are padded and won't interfere with movement. You should also give preference to chairs with height-adjustable armrests.
- Avoid seat pans without a rounded edge. They can cause discomfort and fatigue after only an hour or so. Also, verify you can adjust the position of the seat pan so that the front of an employee's knees are level and feet can be placed firmly on the ground. Doing so will reduce tension on the knee and ankle joints while improving circulation.

WORK SURFACES/ WORKSTATION LAYOUT

- Choose a flat work surface that's between 28" – 30" inches above the floor (tall enough to accommodate chair armrests, etc.)
- Opt for something that's height-adjustable and attach an adjustable keyboard/mouse tray if one is not included. This allows employees to customize their workstation to their individual comfort preference. It also provides more room on the desktop for papers and files.



- Consider options that don't have hard edges with hands and arms naturally rest. They can interfere with circulation and cause discomfort over prolonged periods.
- Plan workstations so employees aren't required to reach above the shoulder. Don't place overhead storage units behind monitors either. Too much of this kind of reaching places undue strain on an employee's back and arm muscles.

MONITORS

- Purchase monitors that have high brightness levels and don't have a noticeable flicker. Look for a refresh rate between 72 Hz and 100 Hz.
- Ensure the top line of screens are slightly below eye level when users are sitting upright. This will keep employees from looking up or down all day long, which can lead to neck and shoulder pain. (Note: for individuals with bifocals/trifocals different adjustments may be needed.)
- Situate monitors 18"– 30" inches from the user, directly in their line of sight. This will prevent eye strain, limit head movement and eliminate neck twisting.



KEYBOARDS

- Place keyboards with the center of the spacebar directly in front of the user. This allows employees to keep arms straight when typing, decreasing muscle strain and improving circulation.
- Choose keyboards that allow users to type without bending their wrists.
- Try out products before making a purchase. Many ergonomic keyboards simply transfer pressure from the wrists to the shoulders and neck.
- Select keyboard trays that are height adjustable and allow employees to tilt for better wrist posture.

SOURCES:

Preventative Measures for Common Musculoskeletal Disorders found in the Office Environment, Haworth Ergonomic Workstations For Computer Workstations, Haworth Cornell University Ergonomics Website (ergo.human.cornell.edu)

INPUT DEVICES (MOUSE/TRACKBALL/TOUCH PAD)

- Ensure the input device is placed by the side of the keyboard in a position that allows employees to keep their upper arms relaxed and close to the body during use. Configurations that allow employees to use their elbow as a pivot point help prevent tendon damage.
- Select mice and trackballs that are easy to operate move freely and don't require users to bend their wrist. This avoids overstretching of the fingers and hands.

WORKSTATION ACCESSORIES

- Make sure commonly used items are situated close to employees. Excessive reaching can lead to back and neck injuries.
- Place a document holder in front of, or adjacent to, the monitor to prevent neck and eye strain.
- Offer telephone headsets to reduce the muscle strain caused by cradling a phone between the neck and shoulder.

LAPTOP COMPUTERS

- Provide an external keyboard, mouse and monitor to those using laptops in the office.
- Add a docking station to minimize muscle and knee strain when reconnecting under counter power cords and peripherals. Docking stations typically contain slots for expansion cards and connectors for peripheral devices, such as keyboards, printers and monitors. Once inserted in a docking station, the portable computer essentially becomes a desktop computer.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

For specific recommendations right for your business, call or stop by our showroom today. Our furniture experts will help you to create an environment that improves both wellness and profitability.



ST. LOUIS OFFICE FURNITURE
419 EAST GANO AVENUE
ST. LOUIS, MO 63147
www.mystloffice.com

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