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Ergonomics: A Simple Solution to That Pain in Your Neck

By **Lori Reed**

Library workers are no strangers to repetitive tasks: checking media in and out, shelving, cataloging and typing. It's no wonder that repetitive stress injuries (RSIs) are the most common work related injury in the United States. But awareness of ergonomics can minimize your risk of developing an RSI.

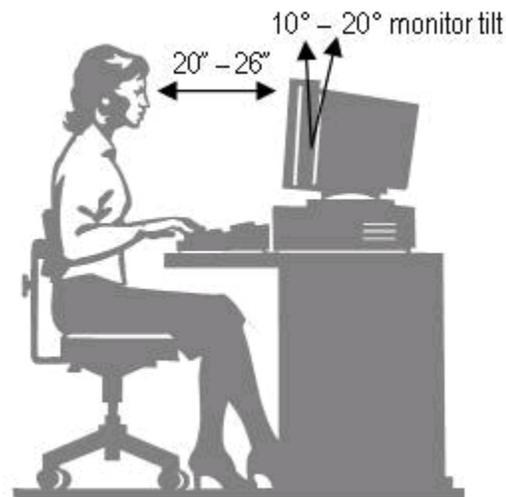
The word “ergonomics” is derived from the Greek words “ergon,” to work, and “nomoi,” natural laws. Ergonomics is the application of scientific information of objects, systems and environment for human use. In the workplace, organizations often design tasks and work areas to maximize your health, safety and productivity. Though often instituted at the institutional level, many ergonomic principles may be initiated by employees. Simple adjustments to a workstation might make all the difference in employee health and productivity.

The key to effective ergonomics is awareness of the body. Remember that the body is designed to move as a whole unit with fluid motions. For example, when using your computer allow your arm and shoulder to move along with your hand to move the mouse. When turning to pick up an object, pivot and use your entire body, not only your hands and back.

The following tips will help you design a more ergonomic workstation.

Monitor

- Position your monitor 20–26 inches from your eyes with the top of the screen even with, or slightly lower than, your eyes.
- Angle the monitor 10–20 degrees (as if reading a book).
- Keep the screen clean.
- If using a document holder, position it at the same height and distance as your monitor to prevent eye strain when glancing back and forth.



Keyboard

- Keep your elbows relaxed and at your side at a 90 degree angle so that your forearms are parallel to the floor.
- Position your keyboard either flat or prop it up using a wrist cushion so that the end closest to you near the space bar is raised.
- Let your hands and wrists float in a neutral position above the desk or wrist rest.

- Avoid resting your wrists while typing.

Mouse

- Hold the mouse with a loose grip.
- Keep your wrist in a neutral position.
- Don't rest your wrist or arm on the desk while using the mouse.
- Use your whole arm and shoulder to move the mouse.

Desk & Chair

- Adjust the height of your chair so that your arms are properly aligned to use the mouse and keyboard. If you are unable to adjust your chair you may also lower the desk or install a keyboard tray below the desk. *[Editor's note: Your facilities staff may be able to refit parts of your workstation by lowering a desk or teaching you how to adjust your chair. You may also find your perfect fit in cast-off furniture or a piece you bring in from home. Because ergonomic workstations may affect your health, check with your human resources staff to find out if there are programs, funds or processes for evaluating and changing your workspace.]*
- To alleviate pressure in your legs, your knees should be slightly lower than hips. If you can, adjust your chair to slope forward.
- Keep your feet flat on the floor or on a foot rest if they don't reach the floor.
- Keep nearby the items you use most frequently.

Phone

- Avoid using your shoulder to hold the phone while talking.
- Use your hand to hold the phone. If you need to use both hands while on the phone invest in a headset.

Lastly, remember to stretch and take breaks often.

For more information visit [Cornell University's Ergonomics Web](#).

Lori Reed is a training specialist for the Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County. She writes about training and library issues on her Web site, [librarytrainer.com](#).

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