

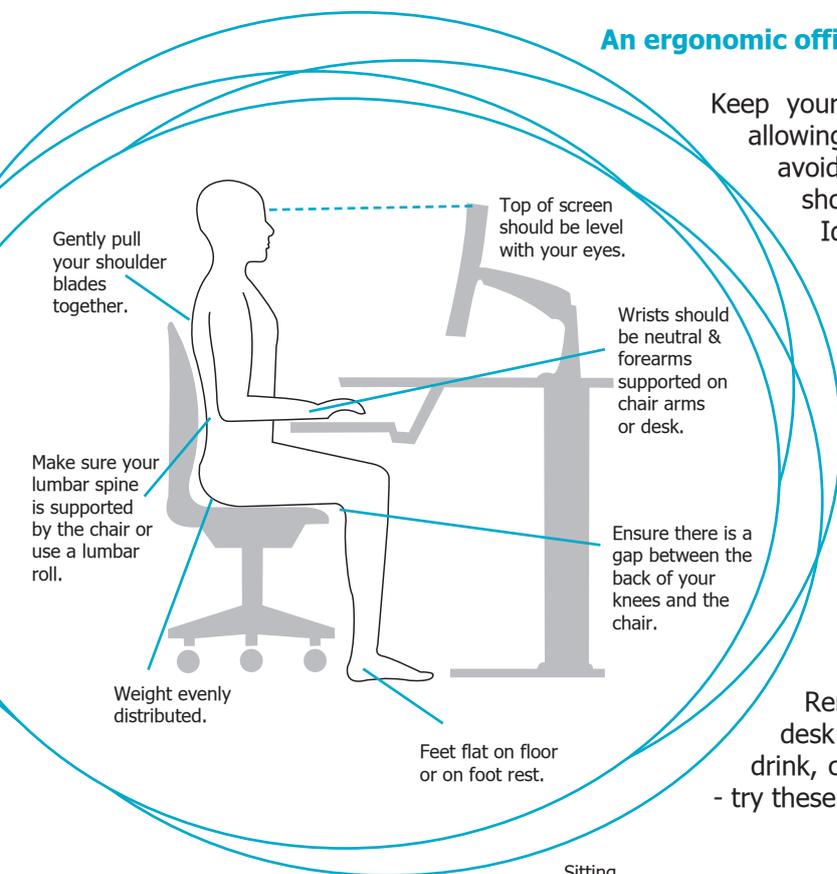
Taking care of your spine at work

At your workstation

The most important thing when working in the office is not to slouch. Make sure your chair is adjusted to suit you and ensure to use its full range of movement to avoid unnecessary twisting and stretching.

If sat at the keyboard for a long time avoid your muscles tensing by adjusting your feet position (forward and back), alter your posture and be sure to take regular breaks. The keyboard and monitor should be directly in front of you to minimise the need to turn your head. When possible, utilise a document holder so that your work can be placed closer to you.

An ergonomic office



Keep your phone within reach of your non-dominant hand, allowing your dominant hand to be free. One thing you should avoid entirely is holding the phone between your ear and shoulder, this can pinch nerves causing pain and injury. Ideally if you need to use both hands while on the phone then a headset should be used.

The top of your monitor should be at eye level, glare reduced and your keyboard tilted toward you.

The best posture while sat at your desk is as follows: feet flat on the floor with your knees at a 90° angle and your chair back supporting your spine. Your shoulders should be relaxed, elbows at 90° allowing your wrists to be in a neutral position. Elbows and forearms should be in a position where they can be supported by either the desk or arms of the chair.

Remember, for every 55 minutes you're working at your desk you should get up and move about for five. Get a drink, chat to colleagues or simply just stretch your muscles - try these exercises...

Sitting

Tilt your head toward one shoulder until you feel the stretch on the opposite side. Using your hand gently pull your head further to the side. Hold approx 10 secs. Repeat to the other side. Repeat 5 times.

Sit on a chair with your fingers clasped behind your neck.

Gently arch back over your chair to stretch your spine, keep your head looking forward. Repeat 5 - 10 times.

Sit on a chair and clasp your arms on your chest.

Gently rotate your upper back as far as possible from left to right. Repeat 5 times each way.



Turn your head to one side until you feel a stretch. Using your hand gently push your head further round. Hold approx 10 secs. Repeat to other side. Repeat 5 times.



Push shoulders forward, stretch the arms diagonally forwards and down keeping your chin tucked in. Hold stretching 10 secs. Repeat 2 times.



Forearm supported on a table with your hand over the edge and palm facing down.

Let your hand drop down. Gently assist the movement with your other hand. Hold 10 secs. Repeat 5 times.

On the move

It is likely that when you are out and about for work you'll be carrying a bag, a brief case or laptop bag. Always try to minimise heavy content. It is important to distribute the weight of the items you do need evenly, so avoid carrying your bag on one shoulder. A rucksack is a much healthier option, keeping the load even, allows both hands to be free (useful for support while on the bus or train) and will lead to a more balanced stride.

Footwear also needs to be considered. High heels tilt the pelvis forward putting unnecessary strain on the spine. Because of this try to wear them only while at work, not during the commute to and from the office.

In the car

Position your seat as is most comfortable, all controls and switches should be within reach without the requirement to over stretch. Use the clutch as a guide, you should be able to comfortably depress it without straining. Make use of lumbar support if your car has it. By adjusting to provide gentle pressure against the lower back.

Once again think about your posture,. Your chin should be in, head up and shoulders relaxed. Avoid gripping the steering wheel too tightly as this will increase tension. While the car is stationary try simple exercises to strengthen core muscles:

Pull in your stomach muscles and breathe out forcefully, relax, repeat
Pull your shoulder blades together, hold for a few seconds, relax, repeat

Lifting and carrying

Bend your knees not your back and pull your stomach muscles in. Stability should be provided by keeping your feet apart. This way you use stronger leg muscles rather than those in your back which are more likely to strain. While carrying a heavy object keep it close to your body putting its centre of gravity as close to your own as possible. When putting it down do the same as when you lifted it - wide stance and bend your knees.

If you have knee problems don't hesitate to speak to your physio about alternative methods of moving and lifting.