TIPS FOR SETTING UP YOUR COMPUTER WORKSTATION

Step 1: Chair

- Make sure that your chair has a stable base and castors. A stable base should have 5 castors. On hard floors your chair should be fitted with soft castors (urethane) to prevent the chair to roll too fast. On a carpeted floor, make sure that your chair has carpet castors, which are made from hard material to enable you to roll your chair without too much resistance from the carpet. Using a soft castor on carpet may cause back problems, while using carpet castors on a hard floor may cause the chair to roll away without you noticing.

- Also make sure that the foam on your chair is still in good shape. You should not be able to feel the bottom of the chair when pushing on the foam of the seat pan.

- All adjustment levers should function properly, as well as the gas lifter, which is the mechanism that makes your chair go up and down.

- When seated at correct height and your feet placed flat on the floor, your knees should be angled anywhere between 90-110°. Be careful to not sit with an angle at your knees at less than 90°, as this may cause back problems, or beyond 110°, as at this height, the front of the seat pan may cut off your blood circulation in your legs.

- To see if your seat pan fits you properly, you should have a space of 2-3 fingers in between the back of your legs and the front of the seat pan. If there is no space, the seat pan may be too big, and you won’t get proper lumbar support, as you will be unable to reach the back rest. On the other hand, if there is too much space, the seat pan may be too small. Also pay attention to the sides. You don’t want to “hang” over the sides.

- The angle of the backrest should be adjusted to anywhere between 90-110° as well. Make sure that the lumbar support of the backrest (the subtle hump you feel when moving your hand over the backrest) is adjusted to correct height. It should fit in your lumbar area, which is the area that naturally curves in when standing.

- On a good ergonomic chair, the armrests should be adjustable in height as well as side ways. Armrests should be adjusted so they don’t interfere with your elbows when doing the “chicken”.
• The material of your chair should be constructed of breathable material, unless your chair is used in a laboratory.

Step 2: Keyboard and mouse

• Once your chair has been adjusted correctly, you will be able to figure out the correct height for your keyboard and mouse:

• While seated in your chair, let your arms hang down from your shoulders. Now bring up your forearms with your hands stretched out, until they are parallel to the floor. Your elbows (make sure they are as close to your body as possible) should form an angle in the range of 90-110°. The keys of your keyboard go to the height at where your fingers are, with the mouse placed beside the keyboard at the same level.

• If you have placed the keyboard and mouse on your desk surface, you may not be able to reach these items properly (i.e., with your elbows at an angle between 90-110°). You can do two things:
  1. Adjust the chair higher with the use of a foot stool, or
  2. Install a keyboard tray. Obviously, option #1 is the cheaper one, but maybe not the best. You may want to contact the OH&S office for a workstation assessment.

Step 3: Monitor

• Always make sure that you place the monitor in line with the keyboard and yourself to prevent neck and shoulder problems.

• Persons using bifocals or graduated lenses, should place the monitor at lower levels, and angled up so that their vision is perpendicular to the screen. Another option is to have your optometrist fit you special computer glasses. Before seeing your optometrist, take measurements of the distance between your eyes and the screen.

• Those who are not wearing such glasses should elevate the level so that the top of the screen (not the monitor) is at eye level.

• A question that is always asked is: How far away should the monitor be placed from the user? The answer would be: If you can read it, that’s most likely the correct distance. (Note: In ergonomic reading material, you are usually advised to place the monitor at a distance between your fingertips and halfway up your hands, when your arms are stretched out in front of you).

Another option, if you have difficulty seeing the content on the screen, is to change the font setting.