How to Make Your Computer Workstation Fit You
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STEP #1

Check your posture

When using your computer, sit with your:

- Forearms held horizontally, elbows bent about 90 degrees (right angle) or slightly greater, with your shoulders and upper arms relaxed
- Wrists in a neutral (straight) posture
- Head upright over your shoulders in a relaxed position, with your eyes looking slightly downward
- Backrest supporting your lower back, pelvis, and the natural curve of your spine
- Thighs resting horizontally with a 90–110 degree angle at the hips
- Feet fully supported by the floor or a footrest

The illustrations on this page and page 6 show this optimal posture. Optimal postures reduce stress on the body, but any posture, including sitting, can lead to fatigue or discomfort if held for a prolonged period.

Pro Tips:
Varying your posture, while keeping it within a comfortable, supported range, can reduce fatigue and discomfort.
These are the recommended angles and positions of joints for sitting at a computer workstation. A posture that changes within a comfortable range is an optimal posture.
The chair position may be uncomfortable for you as a result of one or more of the following:

- Seating that doesn’t adequately support your back may increase fatigue and contribute to poor posture.
- Seating that is too high or too low may result in symptoms in your neck, shoulders, back, or legs.
- Seating that is too low may require you to use awkward arm postures to reach up to the work surface, or may cause you to sit with your knees raised, increasing the stress on your lower back.
- Sitting for long periods without varying your posture increases fatigue.

When you begin to feel discomfort, you may have held a position too long. Avoid fatigue and discomfort by varying your posture regularly throughout the workday. You can do this by adjusting your chair and standing or walking occasionally. Your chair controls should be simple to use so it’s easy for you to adjust your chair, while seated, regularly during the workday. Adjustable features of seating are shown on page 6.

To adjust your chair to the optimal height, raise or lower it so you are sitting with your:

- Forearms held horizontally, elbows bent about 90 degrees (right angle) or slightly greater, with your elbows just clear of the top of the work surface [desk or keyboard tray].
- Wrists straight when you place your hands on the keyboard or mouse [see page 12].
- Thighs resting horizontally with a 90–110 degree angle at the hips.

Ideally, adjusting your chair this way will leave you with sufficient space between the top of your thighs and the bottom of your desk or surface. If you can’t rest your feet firmly on the floor when your elbows just clear the top of your work surface, use a footrest to support your feet.
Footrests

A footrest should have:

- A non-slip surface that is large enough for both feet to rest comfortably (about 30 cm by 30 cm or 1 sq. ft.)

- An adjustable slope (10–20 degrees) to allow a comfortable ankle position when your feet are resting on it

- Enough stability so it doesn’t slide or move when your feet are on it

A footrest supports your feet and reduces the pressure on the back of your thighs that can occur when your thighs contact the seat. Use a footrest if your feet are not flat on the floor when you adjust your chair height as described on page 6. The correct height of the footrest is the distance your feet are off the floor after you have adjusted the seat height.

Armrests

Armrests help support your forearms or elbows, decreasing the stress on your shoulders and back. Your forearms should rest comfortably on the armrests, with your shoulders relaxed. Remove armrests if they:

- Prevent you from placing your chair at a comfortable typing or viewing distance from the screen

- Interfere with typing or using the mouse

- Prevent you from turning your chair or getting up from your chair easily

Other chair features

Your chair should also have the following features:

- A five-point base — A chair with five casters is less likely to tip over than one with four casters.

- Fairly coarse fabric that breathes — Slippery materials such as vinyl may cause you to slide away from the backrest.

- A rounded front edge — A straight front edge will cut into the back of your thighs, making your legs “fall asleep” or causing discomfort at the point of contact.

- A seat that tilts forward and backward — This will allow you to make adjustments to help maintain your curve natural spine.
Backrests

The lower part of your chair’s backrest (the lumbar support) should support the curve of your lower back. If your backrest is adjustable, raise or lower it so the lumbar support fits snugly against your lower back.

If necessary, you can place a small rolled-up towel or small foam pillow in the curve of your back to add support. You should also be able to adjust your backrest forward and backward so it is at an angle of 90–110 degrees, depending on the activities you are performing.
If you need more information or would like to book a workstation assessment, please contact Erin Linde at elinde@sfu.ca.