

# Ergonomic Articles

## Optimal workstation setup

By Angela Hendricks | Added 2012-05-09

Let's have a look at how you can make yourself more comfortable by making small workspace changes.

Your workspace consists of your desk, your computer, your mouse and keyboard, your phone and any other objects around you. How these are arranged will significantly affect your posture and your comfort.

Here is a diagram to show you how to set yourself up correctly. Follow these simple steps: Adjust your chair to the correct height for your keyboard first. Your elbows should be at the height of your keyboard with your forearms parallel to the floor. If you are sitting too low on your chair your shoulders will get tense from trying to reach up to your keyboard.



1. If your feet are not resting on the floor once you are at the correct keyboard height, then get yourself a footrest so that your legs are supported with your hips slightly higher than your knees. Make sure that you are sitting as far back in the chair as possible so that your back and thighs are fully supported. Position the backrest of the chair so that when working on your computer it provides the most support possible.

2. Your computer/laptop should always be centrally located. If your computer is at an angle your neck and/or back are twisted - this can cause tension and trigger points (especially on the side you are rotated towards.)

3. Clear all obstacles underneath your desk. Any objects left at your feet result in you sitting in an awkward position. Nothing should be obstructing your feet.

4. If you work on documents, try using a document holder and have the documents at the same height as your monitor. Be careful of putting documents between you and your keyboard. You will be reaching forward for your keyboard - bringing your shoulders forward causes a rounded shoulder posture as well as muscle fatigue.

5. When positioning the monitor, your viewing distance should be about 45-65cm. Most of us keep the monitor pushed all the way to the back of the desk but if you it's too far away, you end up leaning forward and poking your chin. It should also be at the correct height, with the top line of your work at eye level.

6. If you work on 2 monitors make sure that they are positioned at the same height and distance away from you. If you work equally on both monitors then they should be positioned in the middle, close together. If you spend more than 80% of your day on one of the monitors then this primary monitor should be positioned directly in front of you and then the secondary one next to but slightly off to the side. Brightness and resolution should be the same for both.

7. Mouse and keyboard should be at the same height and distance from you. Let's do some biomechanics for a second... Imagine you are holding a very heavy object...it is much easier to hold it close to your body than away from your body! The same principle applies for the keyboard and mouse. Your shoulder function a lot better when closer to your body.

8. If you spend more than 50% of your day on the phone or need to type while on the phone, acquiring a headset would be wise. For those of you who hold your phone between your ear and your shoulder, try moving your phone to your non-dominant hand so that your writing hand is free!

9. Laptops certainly present ergonomic challenges as they are far less adjustable. The low position of the screen and positive angle of the keyboard make for very poor postures. About 90% of laptop users that we see on a daily basis suffer from neck pain and/or headaches. It is possible to prevent this by either using a separate keyboard, mouse and monitor or by getting a laptop stand or docking station. If none of these are available to you, try raising the back of the laptop a little by placing a book/ream of paper underneath, effectively raising the screen and putting the keyboard at a slight upward angle.

Your workspace should be arranged according to the work that you do and the tasks you perform throughout the day. Think about what your main tasks are and arrange your desk accordingly!

For more information on Ergonomic Workstation Aids please see [www.ergotherapy.co.za](http://www.ergotherapy.co.za)