

Everyday Posture Tips and Simple Guide for Home Office Ergonomic Set-Up

BY ALICIA SKIBINSKI, PT, DPT

“Of all the things you wear, your posture is most important.” – Unknown.

The challenge of maintaining ‘good posture’ is not simply about sitting or standing up straight, as we consistently heard as adolescents, but an important component of overall health throughout the lifespan.

What is Posture?

Posture is how you hold your body while in one position statically (lying down, sitting, standing), or moving (bending, walking, running). Healthy posture allows us to move and perform daily activities while placing decreased stress or tension throughout the musculoskeletal system. It facilitates improved body alignment, allowing muscles to work properly and more efficiently. This contributes to a potential decrease in the development of degenerative arthritis, loss of normal spinal mobility, overuse injuries, and muscular neck/shoulder/low back pain. Healthy posture also facilitates optimal breathing and subsequently decreased energy consumption during strenuous activities.

Below are some simple tips for improving postural awareness:

- **SITTING:** Maintain natural spinal curves by placing a rolled towel at the low back, keep feet flat on the floor or use footrest, do not cross your legs, bend knees to 90 degrees, shoulders should remain relaxed. Avoid long periods of sitting, get up and move to decrease stiffness.
- **STANDING:** Decrease movement of the head forward/backward, maintain ears level/in line with shoulders, feet shoulder-width apart, maintain equal weight through each leg, slightly bend at knees.
- **LYING DOWN:** Try to avoid sleeping with 2-3 pillows under head/neck; Place pillows under knees when lying on your back; Place a pillow between legs when lying on either side.

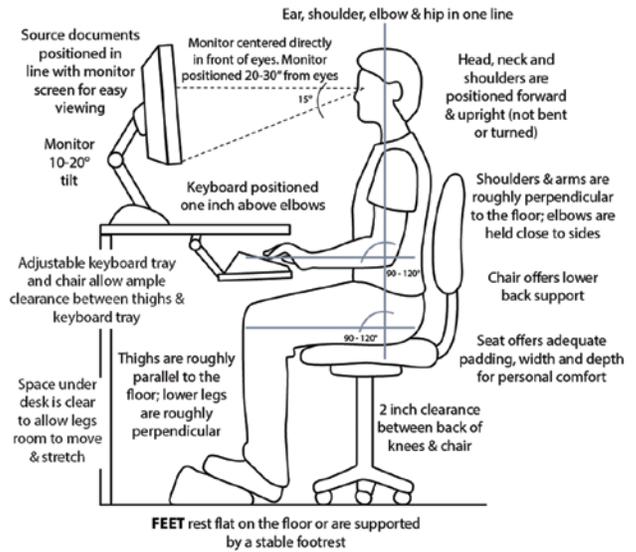
While it is quite challenging to always maintain good posture, increased awareness and slight modifications can provide long-term benefits.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a dynamic shift in how Americans work and live. Many transitioned from offices fully equipped for long-term use to makeshift home offices. Often, people had a limited understanding of and necessary resources to facilitate an optimal home working environment. Poor ergonomic workstation set-ups, if left long term, will likely contribute to the development of musculoskeletal disorders (neck/shoulder/low back pain).

What is Ergonomics?

Ergonomics is the scientific study of people in a working environment. Objects and environments are designed to

THE ERGONOMIC WORKSTATION



Source: <https://ptandme.com/the-ergonomic-workstation/>

adequately fit the user. This facilitates improved productivity, efficiency, and decreases the risk and/or severity of work-related injuries.

Below are some simple and budget-friendly changes to enhance home workstation ergonomics:

- **CHAIR:** Rolled towel or pillow at waistline/low back for improved lumbar support; Cushion or large bath towel on the seat to raise height; Chair positioned closer to the desk to improve spinal alignment and prevent increased bending at the trunk.
- **HARD DESK SURFACE:** Towel or cushioning in front of keyboard to decrease pressure at elbows/wrists.
- **LOW MONITOR HEIGHT/LAPTOP:** Raise monitor height with books at eye level to prevent looking downward and decrease stress at neck/low back; Use an external mouse and or keyboard. With dual monitors, ensure the primary monitor is placed directly in front of you.

A helpful quote for some inspiration:

“Change happens through movement, and movement heals.” – Joseph Pilates

If you are feeling any increase in symptoms after the transition to work at home and/or feel that your posture could use a ‘tune up’, consider consulting a physical therapist. Ask your rheumatologist for more information about physical therapy at Arthritis & Rehabilitation Therapy Services (ARTS).