



# Health Matters

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## Sound Ergonomics Practice is Good Business

You may or may not be familiar with the word "ergonomics," but an understanding of its basic concepts can be positive not only for your employees but also for your business and your bottom line. By adapting ergonomically sound principles, you can improve safety, efficiency and productivity in your company's workplace.

### What is Ergonomics?

Basically, ergonomics is the fitting of the job to the employee. In business terms, ergonomics requires a thorough assessment of how employees relate to their jobs and their work environments. Once that is completed, job tasks, work stations, tools and equipment need to be designed to fit the physical capabilities of people.

Sound ergonomics practice is simply good business. A safe, comfortable workstation can decrease the risk of injury, improve morale and increase productivity.

Nonetheless, many companies choose to ignore ergonomics, fearing that any needed improvements would be too costly. What they do not realize is that following ergonomic principles need not be expensive. Good ergonomics does not always mean expensive new furniture and equipment. In many cases, you can make ergonomically sound improvements by gradually retrofitting existing equipment. Changes can be accomplished over time to lessen costs.

It is certainly not expensive to educate employees about the basics of good posture or the proper way to sit at a computer workstation. Eliminating the glare on a computer screen that can cause eye strain, or even migraine headaches, is not costly or difficult. In some instances, even the use of a telephone book to raise the level of a computer monitor, or of an employee's feet under a desk, can help avoid potential problems. In many cases, ergonomics is more about changing behavior than changing furniture or equipment.

Companies need to have their work areas assessed to determine the need for any ergonomic changes.

The National Institute of Occupational Safety & Health

considers a comprehensive ergonomic assessment of employee computer workstations to include an analysis of individual workstation components, work process flow and workstation environmental conditions. Other factors to consider are the effects of task duration and frequency, exposure to ergonomic stressors such as force and repetition and awkward postures.

Employees should expect sound ergonomic practices in the workplace, and it is management's responsibility to meet those expectations. Ergonomics must be seen not as a one-time project, but rather as an ongoing effort to optimize the work environment.

### Tips for Improved Office Ergonomics

Here are simple things you can do to improve the ergonomics of an office workstation:

1. Tilt or swivel the monitor screen to eliminate reflection on the screen, or add an anti-glare filter.
2. Place the monitor directly in front of you while at the keyboard. The top of the monitor screen should be at or below eye level and roughly an arm's length away.
3. Adjust the height of the chair to achieve proper posture. Adjust the keyboard or chair height to keep forearms, wrists, and hands in a straight line while using the keyboard.
4. Sit with head and neck in upright position, even while on the telephone. Keep shoulders relaxed and elbows close to the body.
5. Persons with sedentary jobs should stand at least once per hour to stimulate circulation and take brief exercise breaks to relieve muscle tension and fatigue.

For more information on ergonomics in the workplace, visit [www.upmchealthplan.com](http://www.upmchealthplan.com).