

Physical Health in the Workplace



One of the best ways we can look after our physical health while we're at work is in the **prevention of pain and injury**.

If your role is fairly sedentary, there are three steps you can follow that will go a long way to ensure you remain physically well in your workplace, whether you're working from a company place of work or from home.

1. Have your workstation set up ergonomically

As we can spend a lot of time at our desks it is important that we have set our workstation up in an ergonomic way. With many people working from home now you may find yourself juggling work between multiple locations. This means you need a good understanding of how to set yourself up each time.

The image below gives you a visual of what you're aiming for. The main things to look out for are:

- ✓ Right angles at your knees, hips and elbows
- ✓ Eyes are in line with the top 1/3 of your monitor (this may require a monitor stand for laptops)
- ✓ Highly used items are within close reach (such as mouse and phone)
- ✓ Avoid holding a phone between your ear and shoulder. Using a headset is best.
- ✓ Set yourself up in the middle of your monitor (if using multiple monitors set up evenly between each).
- ✓ Sit roughly an arm's length (60-70cms) away from the monitor/s



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2. Break up periods of sitting

People with sitting jobs have a higher risk of cardiovascular disease compared with people who have standing jobs. High levels of sitting time are also associated with increased risk of weight gain, Type 2 Diabetes, cancer and premature mortality. It can also increase back pain.

Aim to take a break from sitting every 30 minutes.

Some ideas to sit less during the day:

- Stand while your computer is processing
- Stand during phone calls or meetings
- Walk to another floor to use the bathroom
- Place office items in places you have to get up to reach (e.g. rubbish bin)
- Take your lunch break away from your desk
- Walk over to your colleague instead of emailing

If driving is a part of your working day, try parking further away from your destination or get off at an earlier bus/train stop and complete the journey on foot. Both will help you to sit less and increase the daily number of walking steps you take.

3. Do regular stretching

Stretching your body regularly is a great way to reduce pain and injury. If we're seated in the same position for long periods of time our joints and muscles will adapt to this posture, leading to areas that are tight &/or weak. For example, your 'hip flexor' muscles (those in the front of your body that connect your legs to your torso) can become tight by being in a closed position while sitting throughout the day. This can then affect your posture when you are standing, leading to a slight tilt forward of your body and extra pressure on your lower back.

A series of easy stretches you can do in the office can be found at Mayo Clinic at the link below. Aim to do these several times throughout the day. www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/multimedia/stretching/sls-20076525

SMG Health are here for you 24/7, 365 days a year

For more support, information and coaching on improving your workplace physical health, you can Ask The Expert through your Wellness Gateway and book a free confidential appointment with one of our experienced health professionals.

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Most jobs have some form of manual handling that involves using the body to move, handle or use an object or piece of equipment, whether that's stacking shelves, lifting boxes of supplies, operating machinery, or physical labour. No matter what your job, it's important to look after your physical health by identifying and minimising potential risks, and reading and understanding your body so that it's ready for the task at hand.

While it's your employer's responsibility to provide a safe work environment (including training, incident reporting and appointed work, health and safety personnel), each individual has a duty to act responsibly, comply with training and safety protocols and speak up when there is a potential safety issue.

By encouraging and participating in the conversation about safe work practices, we can look after ourselves and each other. Here, we take a look at some of the ways we can prevent injury and stay safe at work.

Tips for preventing injury at work:

- ✓ Keep frequently used items in close proximity
- ✓ Use trolley jack or forklift - don't try and lift or move items that are far too heavy
- ✓ Removing or installing parts - remember the further away the item is, the more pressure on the spine when lifting, pushing or pulling
- ✓ Even when moving things on and off your desk or work bench, or when bending down to pick something up, use your knees and avoid positions of flexion and rotation at the same time
- ✓ Turn with your feet, not with your back
- ✓ Walk with items close to your body and evenly balanced/weighted in each hand
- ✓ Team lifting required for anything above 20kg
- ✓ Lift with big muscle groups (eg. legs and arms), not small stabilising muscles (eg. spine)
- ✓ Plan your lift - measure with your eyes first, assess the route ahead
- ✓ Lift and transfer heavy equipment using functional movements like lunges and squats

Look after your body and help to prepare it for physical workplace activity:

- ✓ Stay strong:
 - get physically active for aerobic fitness and health
 - engage in resistance training for muscular strength
 - break down physical work tasks and think about what exercises can replicate them
- ✓ Warm up and stretch:
 - ensure your body is thoroughly warmed up before activity to prevent short-term injury such as strained muscles
 - long and strong muscles allow for safe lifting - as part of your exercise routine, use static stretching and hold for 30 seconds or more

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You'll also find helpful information and videos on the Gateway to support you in working safely.

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