

IT ACHES RIGHT HERE

Tips for making office work more comfortable

While passing soreness, discomfort and even brief pain from working at a computer is usually not a serious problem, it requires attention if the discomfort or pain is permanent. Discomfort that has morphed into pain is a tell-tale sign of impending injury, and clearly it is important to address the underlying causes before it gets to this point. Soreness or pain in different body parts typically points to different issues with your workstation setup.

Some of the most common causes of pain and discomfort are set out below, with suggestions for addressing them.

Sore body part	Common contributing factors	What you can try
Back of neck	Looking at a screen set too low or working directly off a laptop. Looking down at documents or keyboard for sustained periods.	Raise your laptop and use an external keyboard and mouse. Raise your screen. Set the top of your screen at around your seated eye height. Use a document holder. Improve your keyboard skills.
Side of neck & front of neck	Looking to one side either frequently or for a sustained period.	Locate documents and screen directly in front of you. Dual screens – put them side-by-side, and bias the screen you use the most to be closest to “straight on”.
Top of shoulders, outside or front of shoulders	Keyboard/desk too high, arms unsupported.	Raise chair, find a thinner table to work at; reduce desk height (if adjustable); use a footrest, rest palms on front of desk, use wrist rest.
Lower back	Leaning forwards and not using backrest. Inadequate lumbar support. Seat pan that is too short, providing insufficient leg support. Prolonged sitting with minimal postural change.	Sit back in the chair and fix anything stopping you from doing that. Adjust backrest height and angle to give firm support; remove arms from chair to enable you to get close to the desk; remove any obstructions under desk (e.g. drawers). Stand up and move for a few minutes every 25 to 30 minutes.
Upper back/neck	Sustained twisted postures.	Sit straight on to your keyboard and screen.
Right arm or shoulder	Arm outstretched and unsupported for sustained periods while clicking on mouse too far to one side.	Move mouse closer to your midline; use single surface desk; reduce mouse actions (use scroll wheel, keyboard shortcuts, dictation software). Use a skinnier keyboard with no numeric keypad. Use a roller mouse.
Left arm, shoulder or neck	Frequent reaching for phone or cradling phone on shoulder.	Bring handset closer. Use a headset.
Leg discomfort, swollen feet, pins and needles	Underside of thighs compressed against chair seat.	Use footrest or reduce desk and chair height.
Headaches	Poor posture, visual problems, glare, noise, stress, high workload.	Set up workstation properly; deal with noise sources; noise cancelling headphones; screen filter; close blinds; close doors, take micropauses (look 20 metres away for 20 seconds every 20 minutes); eye test.
Eye fatigue, temporary short sightedness	Visual problems, screen too close, poor image quality, glare, screen reflections.	As per “headaches”.