

A guide to keeping healthy at your workstation

You may not know it but working at your computer can take a toll on your body.

Sore muscles, headaches, eyestrain, tension and fatigue can sometimes come with the territory. That's the bad news but the good news is that you can do something about it.

Take just a few minutes during your day to do a few of these easy exercises – right in your workplace. They'll help to loosen up your muscles, keep you more alert and make a big difference to how you work and feel.

Here are some exercises you can do at your workstation:

Sit into your chair with your back supported, shoulders relaxed, hands by your sides.

For your neck and head

Turn

Sit up straight, turn your head to the left and look over your left shoulder. Hold for a few seconds, return to centre and look over your right shoulder. Repeat on each side and breathe as normal.

For your shoulders

Shrug

Slowly raise your shoulders towards your ears and hold for three seconds. Slowly bring your shoulders down and relax. Repeat three times. Breathe in on the way up and out on the way down.

Squeeze

Put your arms up with forearms raised. Gently push your arms back, squeezing your shoulder blades. Hold for a few seconds, relax and repeat three times. Breathe in on the way back and out on the way forward.

Roll

Shoulders relaxed. Lift shoulders up, roll shoulder backwards and down around and up again. Repeat 5 times. Then roll shoulder in opposite direction. Lift shoulders, roll shoulder forward and down around and up again. Repeat 5 times.

For your wrists, hands and feet

Shake

While standing or sitting, drop your arms to your sides. Gently shake out your arms and hands for a few seconds and relax. Breathe as normal and repeat three times.

Stretch

Hold your arms straight out in front of you. Place hands together and gently push forward. Hold for a few seconds and relax. Breathe out as you push forward and repeat three times.

Swivel

While sitting, slowly rotate one foot at the ankle, three times clockwise, then three times anti-clockwise. Rotate the other foot three times in each direction. Relax and repeat three times with each foot.

For your eyes

Palm them

Lean your elbows on your desk. Cup your hands and place them lightly over your closed eyes. Hold for a minute while breathing deeply in and out. Slowly uncover your eyes.

Roll them

Close your eyes and slowly roll your eyeballs clockwise all the way around. Repeat three times. Now slowly roll them all the way around anti-clockwise. Repeat three times.

Look Away

Every half hour, look away from the computer screen. Focus on an object at least 20 feet away. Repeat this three times.

Wriggle your bum on the seat. This will ease some of the muscle tension; we tend to hold a lot of tension in our buttocks.

Change your posture frequently to minimize fatigue.

Move your feet often.

Get up and **move around** frequently.

Workstation Layout

Display screen

- The top of your monitor should be at or just below eye level (if it is not, tilt it downwards).
- The screen should be about an arms length from your eyes.

Keyboard

- Position your keyboard to be the same height as your elbows. Angle the keyboard to keep your hands and wrists in a straight position. (Not bent up or down).
- To help keep your wrists relaxed, try using a wrist rest. Place the mouse on your appropriate side.

Adjust your chair

- Because you spend most of your day sitting, the chair is the main support for your body. A well-adjusted chair improves circulation and helps prevent backache and fatigue.
- When seated, your feet should rest firmly on the floor with the back supported, the thighs horizontal and the angle between the upper legs and the back at 90°. Use footrest if available.
- Adjust the lumbar pad on your chair to fit into the curve of your lower back.
- Set the arm rests at the height of your elbows when you arms are at your side.

Changing your habits

- Try to organise your work demands to give your body a 'postural' break. Change your sitting posture frequently to avoid muscle fatigue.
- Spread your keyboarding demands during the day rather than intensively typing in one specific period.
- Type in a relaxed and natural manner.
- Stand up and stretch for a few minutes several times a day.
- Minimise reaching across the body for items – try to place objects to the side they will be used.
- Try not to cradle the phone in your neck – use the 'handfree' option on the telephone or use a headset.