

Dear Counselors, Staff etc.

I recently did some injury prevention evaluations for DOR employees and was asked about sharing this information with others. Since I can't get out and see everyone I thought I would try to put the best ideas and information that I have come across in this email. Since I am often asked about other topics I will try to write an email about a topic that I have been asked frequently about. I will try to keep these emails short and sweet. Feel free to share these with others and if you would prefer to not get these emails, let me know that as well or if you want to get added to the list. My next topic may cover one handed keyboards, if you have any suggestions for a topic related to assistive technology or ergonomics please feel free to let me know.

Attached is a 1 page handout describing a good ergonomic position for using the computer and some basic stretches that you can do in about 30 seconds.

Adjusting your chair:

One big issue I see when doing an ergonomic evaluation are people who do not know how to adjust their chairs. Take some time and play with the levers to figure out what they do or ask someone to help you. Most chairs have a 2 or 3 paddle configuration on the right side. Usually the one furthest back controls the back angle, the middle one usually controls the height and the front one controls the chair's ability to rock or lean and forward and back.

Basic ergonomic principles:

1. Avoid asymmetric or awkward postures (sounds pretty obvious) but the body is most comfortable in a neutral position. I often see people twisting to write or leaning forward to see the computer screen. Since most of us are getting older our eyes may not be as good as they once were bringing the monitor closer may enable you to sit back in your chair. When you sit back in the chair, it is doing the work, when you lean forward, you are doing the work.
2. Listen to your body. Not everyone likes to sit the same way. Some people may like the keyboard in a negative tilt while others may like it in neutral or a positive tilt. Try different ways to sit and pay attention

to what feels the best to you. The attached picture is a guideline. Not everyone has to sit exactly this way.

3. Take frequent breaks (no, not 2 hour breaks). Even micro breaks to stretch are critical. People think that because they are sitting most of the day they do not need to stretch out the way and athlete does before competing, but this is not true. Because you are sitting your body will get sore and needs to move. Most people wait until they are sore to stretch. While this may help, it would be better if people would stretch throughout the day and then they would not be as sore. At least once an hour take a micro-break. The stretches attached are for people without any injuries. If you have an injury such as Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) then consult your therapist for special stretches and exercises.
4. Think about the items you most frequently use and move them within easy reach. Less frequently used items can be positioned further away.

Other Issues:

Footrest:

A foot rest is not only for shorter individuals but can also help relieve lower back stress by slightly elevating the feet and also helps the person sit back in their chair. You can use an old binder (not the RAM or RPM if you still have them) as foot rest.

Keyboard Trays:

Keyboard trays can be very useful but if the person has to constantly move them out of the way they can be more of a problem. And sometimes the tray is not wide enough for the mouse and keyboard. The user must constantly reach to access the mouse which can cause a lot of stress on the arm. Keyboard trays also tend to place you further away from the desk, documents, telephone etc. Constantly reaching for these things can cause problems. I have often moved the tray out of the way and placed the keyboard and mouse on the desk so that the person can more easily move around the office and reach items.

If you have any questions I can be reached by email at jtsymons@sbcglobal.net or (916)933-2375.

Thanks,

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