

**THE OFFICE ATHLETE SERIES:**  
**PART ONE – OFFICE ERGONOMICS**

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The soft tissue (muscles, ligaments, tendons, nerves) and bones (joints) in the body are dynamic substances – they are influenced by the stresses (and positioning) that we place on them throughout our day. Through implementation of correct workplace design and efficient body mechanics (good posture, breaks, and stretching), we can minimize stress to our body, and ultimately help prevent injuries.

### 1. Starting with Correct Office Equipment

Correct workplace design and appropriate equipment promotes good alignment of our joints – upright, vertical positioning of the spine and neutral positioning of the joints in our arms and legs.

- The right chair. Adjustable features allow you to custom fit your chair to your body, as opposed to having to accommodate your body to the chair. For example, a chair that would be appropriately adjusted for someone over 6 feet would ideally be re-adjusted for someone under five feet. Check for adjustable features that allow you to raise and lower the height of the armrests, as well as the height of the chair, and position of the back support of the chair.
- Do you have to reach or slouch to access documents, telephone, keyboard or mouse? Do you have to twist or rotate your body to speak with colleagues as they enter your workspace area? Can your desk be positioned so that you can maintain upright posture (back straight without twisting) while addressing co-workers? (Repetitive twisting throughout the day can accumulate and then contribute to strain on the muscles, ligaments, nerves and bones in our neck, back and arms and legs).
- Is the height of your workspace adjustable? For example, when reviewing maps or draft plans, can work space be raised or angled desk-top be used to promote vertical alignment of the spine and minimize back strain? Can you raise the whole height of your work station to accommodate some time in a standing position throughout the day instead of sustained sitting?
- Is your mouse in good condition? Are the buttons responsive and easy to push? Can you alternate the function of each mouse key to prevent overuse of certain fingers?
- Utilize wrist rests to maintain a neutral position of your wrist to prevent injury to your wrists, hands, arms and neck.
- Do you have a document holder to minimize repetitive looking downwards or off to the side?
- Is the telephone within close access to avoid repetitive reaching and slouching? Do you have a headset to allow for upright posture and to minimize strain to neck?

### 2. Good Alignment and Good Posture

Good posture refers to the optimal, upright and vertical alignment of the spine – designed to minimize stress to our muscles, nerves, ligaments and joints, and to prevent pain and injury.

- Sit far back in your chair, with buttocks touching the back of the chair.
- Ensure that the low back is supported with either a lumbar support or through chair supports.
- Position feet either flat on the floor, or resting on a foot rest or phonebook.
- Adjust height of your chair to allow approximately 90 degree angle between your knees and hips.
- Sit close enough to your monitor to allow access to your keyboard, mouse, phone and documents without slouching or reaching.
- Rest arms close to your body, with elbows positioned approximately 90 degrees.
- Keep wrists in a neutral position, without sustained bending.
- Ensure that your computer monitor and keyboard are centered directly in front of you.
- Adjust the height of your monitor to allow optimal, upright vertical position of your neck and back while looking at your monitor (if the monitor is too low, excessive looking downwards can contribute to neck and back strain).

### 3. Daily Tips

- Change your position frequently and incorporate simple stretches into your regular work routine to help prevent muscle fatigue and soreness, while promoting good circulation.
- Try an on-screen computer timer to ensure regular mini-stretch breaks at least once per hour.
- Get up and walk around! Walk to grab some water, go to the printer, and use the stairs!
- Vary your tasks throughout the day to prevent strain! Try “cross-training”: while at work – alternate filing with speaking on the telephone, intersperse meetings with breaks to get up and walk around, break up long filing tasks with computer work, take a break from keyboarding and using the mouse to review documents.