Chair setup at your computer

Hello, I'm Sarah Mahoney, an occupational health physiotherapist. Here is some simple information to help you recognise poor movement patterns in the workplace that cause pain and discomfort, and some methods for you to change these movement patterns and get rid of your pain.

These same principles of good use work habits apply whether you are working on a desktop, a laptop or a mobile device. Always consider the length of time you are working in one position or doing a repetitive task.

Chair Adjustments
Your chair needs to fit you and the job that you are doing. There are many different types of chair. You must know how to adjust your chair, a bit like learning how to change gears on a car with a manual shift. Your chair seat should fit the width of your bottom and be deep enough to support along the length of your thigh to within four fingers of the back of your knee. The edge of the seat should have a gentle downwards curve, like a waterfall, so there is no pressure on the underside of your leg. You should be able to slide your hand between your thigh and your seat like this.

If your chair is too high you can’t get your hand in, so you need to either add a footrest or lower the chair down a bit and adjust your desk height. This is really important for the blood circulation of your legs and to help you keep your lower back against the chair back without tensing forwards.

Are you aware of your chair adjustments? Some chairs have a ratchet system for adjusting the chair back. This chair has got a knob. You need to get the lower back support above the bulge of your bottom and tighten up the back of the chair.

This lever brings the upper back in and out. You can lock it wherever you like. But you want to imagine that you’ve got something like a $100 dollar note at the top of the chair back and keep your back pressed against it. You’ll need to keep your chair in close to the desk edge so that you can reach everything without taking your back away from the chair back. This lever is also useful for allowing you to rock, and as you rock you are stretching your hip joints. Your hip joints get very stiff if you are sitting still in a 90 degree position for a long time.

Get to know your chair and its adjustments otherwise you may as well be sitting on the kitchen stool.

People often ask about sitting on a physio ball at work. This is not recommended for long periods of time, but it is useful for when you are in meetings or for time-out sessions from the computer because you can move around and relax your back – and any movement is good for you.

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