

Workplace Health

“That Burning Sensation”

The life of anyone required to sit and work at a desk for extensive periods can result in nagging neck and back pain. When working at a desk, the sustained posture results in reduced circulation to the neck and upper back muscles, which then become tired and fatigued. These muscles fail to support good upright posture and eventually become over stretched and weak. This can then result in POSTURAL PAIN SYNDROME. It is more commonly described as a burning sensation across the upper shoulder region or a dull ache in the lower back. Once this problem becomes significant the services of physiotherapy and massage therapy can help to alleviate the pain and correct the long standing imbalances that have lead to the problem. However, there are simple self applied techniques that can help prevent and manage the problem.

If you resemble the following seated posture, the “ slumper” (see diagram A) you are bound to experience back, shoulder and neck discomfort eventually. This kind of posture can also lead to shoulder and arm pain and even pins and needles or tingling into the hands. Instead if you resemble the “posture perfect” there will be less chance of discomfort.(see diagram B)

SELF HELP:

Don't:

- Slump sit (shoulders rounded and head forward posture). Your low back should be supported.
- Lean forward and downward to reach your work.
- Sit with neck forward or for long periods of time without getting up. (Move around every twenty minutes).

Do:

- Sit close to your work and in a chair that is low and allows the placement of both feet flat on the floor or place books or a box under your feet.
- Sit with hips and knees at 90 degrees.
- Have a chair that supports your back in a slightly extended position. (A towel or sweater / jacket can be placed against chair to help support your lower back).
- Keep chin positioned over breast bone and shoulders pulled back over hips to help minimize postural strain.

What to look for in a good ergonomic chair:
(see diagram C)

1. Hydraulic controls.
2. Seat back adjusts up and down.
3. Seat back tilts forward and backwards.

4. Seat pan tilts.
5. Caster easy roll base.
6. Seat back supports natural lumbar curve.
7. Seat height adjusts.
8. Water fall seat front (to decrease pressure on thigh).
9. Seat back and seat pan appropriate size for user.
10. Armrests to support elbow and shoulder region, which can pull on neck and upper back muscles.

For those who are required to stand for extended periods or do experience postural pain when walking the following tips can help prevent discomfort.

Don't:

- Wear high-heeled shoes, hard heeled or platform shoes for long periods of time.
- Stand in one position for too long (greater than 15 minutes).
- Stand with knees locked, stomach muscles relaxed and swayed back. (see diagram D)
- Stand bent forward at your waist with your work in a low position.

Do: (see diagram E)

- Put one foot up and change positions often when standing for long periods of time.
- Keep work at a comfortable height.
- Change positions frequently.
- Stand on a cushioned mat