

INSIGHT
Guest Perspective

Dr. Christopher Sliva
Rockford Spine
Center

Is your work space spine friendly?

Many of us will experience some form of back pain in our lifetime. Some cases are more severe than others, and there are a variety of causes. A well known trigger to back pain can be your work environment. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports 195,150 cases involving work-related injuries to the back in 2009. While many of these injuries are related to lifting and pulling, some could be the result of poor posture and a lack of ergonomics in your work space.

Take a look at your office space. Do you or your employees look comfortable? Are desks and chairs at the right height? Are you slouched in your chair or hunched over? A few small changes in the work space can go a long way towards helping you and your employees avoid excessive back and neck strain.

Here are the top things you should know to make sure your office set-up is good for your spine.

Workspace Ergonomics

Chair Essentials. Use a well-constructed ergonomic chair to help reduce fatigue and discomfort, increase your blood flow, and reduce the risk of injury to your neck and spine. Make sure your office chair has a good backrest that provides lumbar support, is not too high, and that you can rest your feet on the ground, can rotate and swivel, and recline – sitting at a 100 to 110 degree angle is better.

Desk Details. Make sure your desk is stable and at a good height – 28 to 30 inches above the floor is suitable for most adults. You also will want it to be large enough to accommodate your computer and a separate space for writing and other tasks.

Computer Set-Up. Since so much office work is done on computers, where your equipment is placed can make a difference in how your back feels when you are at work. Try tilting the keyboard down and slightly

directly in front of you at eye

level. If using a laptop, consider getting an external monitor and/or keyboard. This will allow you to move each of these components separately to create a comfortable arrangement.

Posture is Key

You could have all of the latest technology and equipment, but if you're not sitting properly, your spine will suffer. To avoid back pain, make sure to do the following:

- Sit upright with your back and shoulders against the back of the chair.
- Avoid holding your phone between your head and shoulder.
- Don't slouch.
- Arms should rest lightly on the armrests to avoid circulatory problems or nerve pressure.
- Keep your feet flat on the floor and try to avoid crossing your legs.
- Relax your shoulders while typing.

Take Breaks

Taking occasional spine breaks can help you avoid excessive strain. Stretch, take a short walk, get the blood flowing. When you are at your desk, avoid staying in one position for a long time. Try switching between sitting and standing.

We can't always prevent injuries and accidents in the workplace, but reducing some of the risk factors certainly can help. Protecting your spine when you can will help keep you and your employees happy and healthy on the job.

Dr. Christopher Sliva is a fellowship-trained spine surgeon with Rockford Spine Center, 2902 McFarland Road in Rockford.