



# Office Ergonomics Guideline





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Resource: Quick Reference – Checking Your Workstation Set-up



## 1. Managing Office Ergonomics

This guideline describes the general principles of office ergonomics and will assist supervisors/managers and staff with the setup of their workstations to minimise the risk of musculoskeletal injuries.

## 2. Information for Persons-in-Charge/Principals/Managers

- i. Postural discomfort and musculoskeletal injury are identified as workplace health and safety risks for staff who work at a computer/workstation. A well designed workstation that has been adjusted correctly can reduce the risk of musculoskeletal injuries and improve overall comfort and productivity.
- ii. Staff need to know how to correctly use and adjust furniture and equipment. This guideline provides information to assist staff gain this knowledge and skill e.g. [Workstation Ergonomics – General Principles \(page 8\)](#).
- iii. Information and training can be provided in a number of ways including:
  - a. Providing staff with this guideline and/or talking through the document with staff
  - b. Showing the [Office Ergonomics Information Session](#) (PowerPoint Presentation)
  - c. Using the [Workstation Ergonomics Self-Assessment Template](#)
  - d. Engaging external consultants to conduct training.
    - Refer to *Departmental Preferred Supplier Arrangement for [Workplace Assessment and Ergonomics Training Providers DETSOA100983](#)*.
- iv. By providing information, training (e.g. through induction) and appropriate resources staff can gain the skills to assess their own workstation ergonomics. A [Workstation Ergonomics Self-Assessment Template](#) has been designed for this purpose.
- v. Staff should be encouraged to undertake the self-assessment when they commence at a new workplace, move to a new workstation or if they experience musculoskeletal discomfort during the normal work day.
- vi. A discussion between the staff member and their supervisor should be undertaken after the completion of the assessment so that outcomes, including any identified issues can be addressed.
  - Please refer to the [flowchart](#) which describes the process to follow if further assistance is required.

If staff experience an injury, ensure that the incident detail is recorded into the appropriate system (e.g. MyHR WHS/Aurion) and managed in accordance with departmental procedure: [Health and Safety Incident Recording and Management](#).

Injured staff should be encouraged to seek medical advice (e.g. general practitioner). The [Workplace Rehabilitation and Return to Work Coordinator/Injury Management Consultant](#) may be able to provide additional information and assistance.

In accordance with departmental procedure for [reasonable adjustment](#) most adjustments can be made at little or no cost. Reasonable adjustment should be funded from local budgets. If the cost cannot be met at the local level, the supervisor/manager should determine if funding can be accessed from an alternative source within or outside the department.

**Rehabilitation and Return to Work Coordinators** - The department's [Workplace Rehabilitation Procedure](#) states that every school or workplace should have access to an accredited Rehabilitation and Return to Work Coordinator (RRTWC). RRTWCs perform the functions identified in the [Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Act 2003 \(Qld\)](#), and fulfill the [responsibilities](#) as listed in the Workplace Rehabilitation Procedure. RRTWCs can liaise with state-wide [Injury Management Consultants](#) as required.

Maintenance of records, including induction, training, copies of completed assessments and documented outcomes are important to demonstrate management commitment to positive workstation ergonomics.





### 3. Information for Employees

When working at a computer/workstation, you may experience postural discomfort, particularly if the same position is maintained for extended periods of time. This discomfort can be minimised with a well-designed and correctly adjusted workstation that supports correct posture. An understanding of office ergonomics principles, good workplace layout and managing tasks to incorporate regular postural breaks is also important.

- i. Office Ergonomics information and training is provided so staff can correctly use and adjust their own workstation as well as arrange work tasks to minimise the risk of injury.
  - ii. Information and training can be accessed in a number of ways e.g.
    - a. Reading this guideline
    - b. Viewing the PowerPoint Presentation ([link](#))
    - c. Using the [Workstation Ergonomics Self-Assessment](#)
    - d. Seeking further support if required.
  - iii. A [Workstation Ergonomics Self-Assessment](#) has been developed as guidance for the correct set up and review of a workstation. This is particularly important when starting at a new location or in desk sharing arrangements e.g. “hot desking”.
  - iv. Use the [Workstation Ergonomics – General Principles \(p8 of this Guideline\)](#) for more information when preparing to undertake the Self-Assessment Checklist. This process is most effective when completed in small groups or in pairs. This allows the one person to sit at their workstation while another observes their posture and assists in adjusting the workstation.
  - v. If musculoskeletal discomfort is experienced as a result of working at your desk, use the Self-assessment Checklist to quickly identify and address the issue. Speak with your supervisor/manager about the outcomes of this assessment e.g. if you identify issues that you cannot resolve.
- Please refer to the [flowchart](#) which describes the process to follow if further assistance is required.

In the event of injury, be sure to notify your supervisor and seek medical advice (e.g. general practitioner).

Be sure to advise your supervisor/manager in the event of a diagnosed injury to ensure compliance with departmental procedure: [Health and Safety Incident Recording and Management](#).

The [Workplace Rehabilitation and Return to Work Coordinator/Injury Management Consultant](#) may be able to provide additional information and assistance to staff as well as supervisors/managers.



#### 4. Workstation Assessments

Using this guideline and the resources provided, staff are usually able to undertake their own workstation assessment, in pairs or in small groups. The regular review of workstation set up and task management aims to identify and rectify issues before they are problematic e.g. address a minor postural discomfort before it becomes a musculoskeletal injury.

It may be necessary for a staff member to receive a professional assessment and/or training by an external professional such as an occupational therapist e.g. following an injury, to prevent the aggravation of a pre-existing injury or as part of reasonable adjustment to the workplace.

Funding for these services is generally sourced locally from the work unit. In some instances, funding may be available from an alternate source e.g. Job Access for those with a defined disability or WorkCover for those with an accepted claim for worker's compensation. Contact the local [Workplace Rehabilitation and Return to Work Coordinator/Injury Management Consultant](#) for advice on eligibility and assistance in accessing these funds.

DETE has a preferred supplier arrangement in place for services relating to Workstation Ergonomics Training and/or Assessments.

- Workstation Ergonomics Training
- Workstation Ergonomics Assessment (proactive/educational)
- Workstation Ergonomics Assessment (post injury)

Refer to Departmental Preferred Supplier Arrangement for [Workplace Assessment and Ergonomics Training Providers DETSOA100983](#).

**Note:** Contractors for each region are listed in the [Price Guide](#) of the Preferred Supplier Arrangement. Managers can access services from the "Whole of State" preferred suppliers or from the preferred suppliers that have been identified for their specific region.

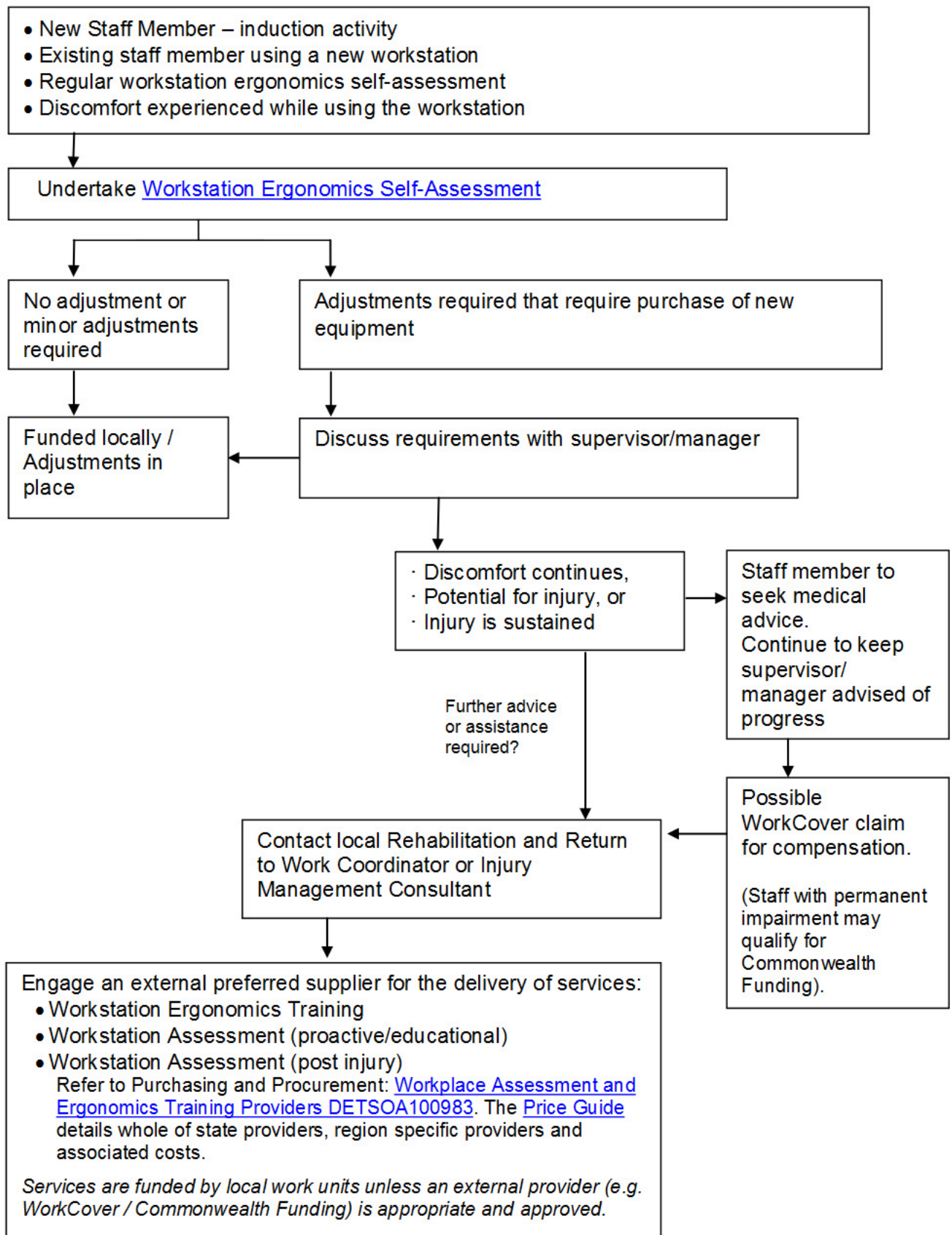
#### 5. Implementing Workstation Ergonomics Process – what to do:

- Staff are provided with general information or training on office ergonomics.
- Staff regularly review work environment by completing the "Workstation Ergonomics Self-Assessment".
- If a staff member experiences musculoskeletal discomfort they are encouraged to undertake the "Workstation Ergonomics Self-Assessment" to identify any contributing factors.
- Following the assessment staff and supervisors discuss the outcomes and any adjustment if necessary.
- Funding for assessments, training, equipment and/or modifications is generally sourced locally from the work unit.
- If a staff member continues to experience discomfort or suffers a musculoskeletal injury, they are encouraged to seek medical advice from their doctor (e.g. general practitioner).
- The doctor or other health professional may recommend a professional workstation assessment, treatment and/or workstation adjustments.
- Services are available via Departmental Preferred Supplier Arrangement for [Workplace Assessment and Ergonomics Training Providers DETSOA100983](#) – refer to the [Price Guide](#) for whole of state providers, region specific providers and associated costs.
- In such instances, supervisors/managers can seek assistance from the local Rehabilitation and Return to Work Coordinator or Injury Management Consultant.
- If an injury is diagnosed and/or a claim for workers' compensation is made, the local Rehabilitation and Return to Work Coordinator or Injury Management Consultant may be able to access funds via WorkCover.





## 6. Flowchart - Workstation Ergonomics Assessments





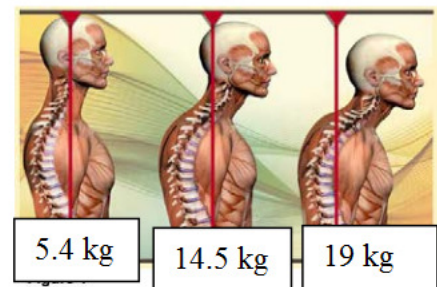
## 7. Workstation Ergonomics - General Principles

### a. Posture

Good posture is required to ensure the neck and spine do not carry more weight than necessary.

Sustained awkward postures may place unnecessary strain on back and neck which may lead to pain or injury. E.g. for every inch (2.5cm) the head moves forward, the pressure on the spine increases as if the head weighed an extra 4.5kg.

Setting up your workstation properly encourages good posture and minimises risk of discomfort and injury.



### b. Chairs

Chairs are one of the most important pieces of office equipment. To be effective, the chair needs to be adjusted to suit the user.

Features of a well-designed chair that can be adjusted to suit a range of people include:

- back rest easily adjustable in height and angle
- back rest provides lumbar support
- height of chair is adjustable
- seat (pan) width is appropriate for the individual user
- seat (pan) depth is appropriate or adjustable
- adjustable or removable armrests
- five star castor base for stability, and
- “breathable” fabric.



**Height** - The seat height should be adjusted so your feet rest firmly on the floor allowing you to take some weight through your feet when you are seated. As a guide, while standing, adjust the height of the chair so the highest point of the seat is just below your kneecap. If you feel pressure near the back of the seat, raise your chair. If you feel pressure near the front of your seat, lower your chair.



**Back Support** – The height of the back rest should ensure the lumbar pad supports the natural curve of your lower back. The back rest should be able to tilt slightly to allow a comfortable and supported sitting position to be achieved.

**Seat Tilt** – Seat tilt can be adjusted to improve your comfort. This will also affect your weight distribution. A small tilt of approximately five degrees is usually recommended (i.e. seat pan sloping downwards slightly rather than upwards).



**Depth of Seat** – When sitting, your thighs should be fully supported by the seat pan. The pan should allow you to use the back support without the front of pressing against the backs of your knees. If the seat pan is too deep, try a back support to reduce the length of the seat pan. Some chairs may have adjustable seat pans.

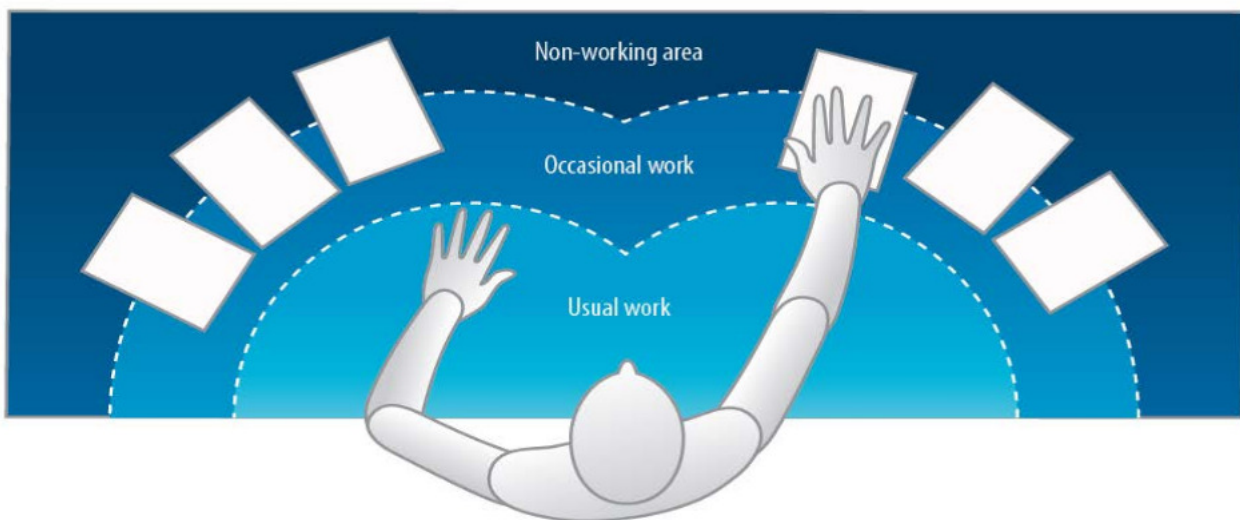




**Width** – The seat pan should be wide enough so it does not apply pressure to your thighs. Conversely the seat should be narrow enough so you can comfortably reach the armrests, if applicable.

**Arm Support** – Armrests can provide support for the upper part of your forearms; however armrests should not prevent the chair from being drawn close to the desk or restrict natural movements. Generally, the inclusion of armrests comes down to personal preference. If armrests are used they should be adjusted to elbow height. If armrests are not appropriate or comfortable they can often be removed.

### c. Work Surface/Desk



Once you have adjusted your chair you can determine the appropriate height for your desk. When you are seated, the top of your desk should be at elbow height. If your desk height cannot be lowered or raised to accommodate this height, you can raise your chair and use a footrest to ensure your feet are still comfortably flat.

When setting up your workstation, items that are used frequently should be located within the “usual work” area (see illustration above). Items that are used occasionally should be located in the “occasional work” area.

Consider keeping items that are used infrequently in the “non-working area” or away from your desk to encourage you to stand up and move away from your workstation/seated position. This will promote blood circulation and assist you to take natural breaks from your workstation.

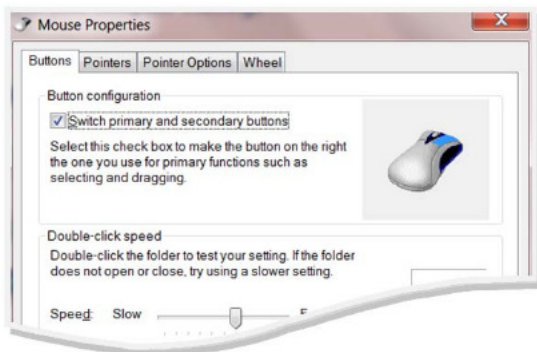


#### d. Keyboard/Mouse

You should be able to maintain the recommended seating position when using the keyboard. The keyboard should be placed 6 – 7 cm from the edge of the desk to allow forearm/wrist to rest when you are not keying. The keyboard should lie flat or negatively inclined (i.e. tilted slightly away from you) not propped up on keyboard legs – see illustration.

When using the keyboard, short breaks of 30 – 60 seconds should be taken as needed to relax your hands in your lap or on your desk. After extended periods of keying, you should change activity to relieve fatigue and rest tired muscles.

The mouse should be positioned at the same level as the keyboard and within easy reach. You may wish to change the hand that you use to operate the mouse throughout the day. The mouse button settings (left / right click) can be changed in the “Control Panel” settings on your computer.



As learning to use your non-dominant hand for the mouse can take time and may be frustrating at first, a gradual change is recommended. Try to limit the use of the mouse and where possible use the key functions (shortcuts) on the keyboard if you experience pain or discomfort when using the mouse.

#### e. Computer

The distance that you sit from your monitor will depend on your vision, the font size and the size and resolution of your monitor.

If you sit at your desk in a neutral position and straighten your arm in front of you, your fingertips should be touching the monitor.

**Height and Location** – The monitor should be positioned directly in front of you with the top of the monitor just below eye level to accommodate normal head position and line of sight.

If you wear bifocals, the monitor may need to be even lower. Some people find that a second pair of glasses is useful for computer work or a computer prescription may be needed in the upper part of the lens. Your optometrist will determine the best solution for you.



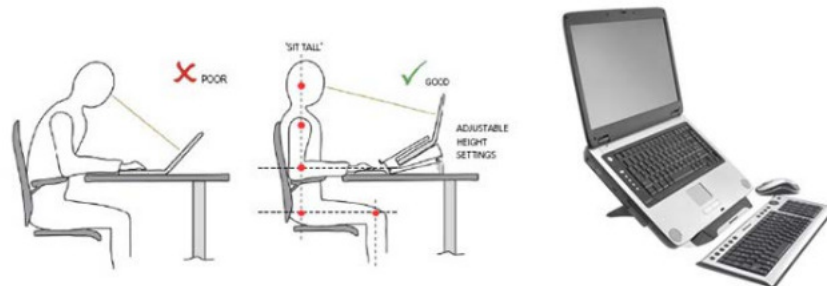


## f. Laptops

With the increased use of laptops it is important to remember that the same workstation ergonomics principles apply. While laptop computers offer a convenient and compact way to make work portable, their design is focussed on convenience rather than promoting good posture.

Whenever possible, a “docking station” should be used to allow the laptop to connect a keyboard, mouse and monitor. If a “docking station” is not practical, an external keyboard, mouse, and monitor stand are recommended particularly if the laptop will be used for an extended period of time.

Prolonged use of laptops in awkward postures should be minimised. Breaks should be taken more frequently when using a laptop. For further information, please refer to the [Safe Use of Laptops Factsheet](#).

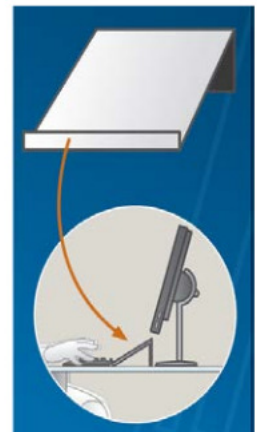


## g. Accessories

**Document Holder and Document Ramps** – If a document ramp is used it should be placed directly between your keyboard and your monitor, this will minimise refocusing when your eyes go from the document to the screen. If a vertical document holder is used, it should be positioned next to the monitor for the same reason.

**Palm Rest/Wrist Support** – Palm rests are designed to raise the palm to keep the wrist in a neutral position. Palm rests should be used while taking short breaks from typing or using the mouse, they are not designed to be used to support the wrists whilst using these devices.

**Telephone** – Your telephone should be kept within easy reach, within the “usual work” area. If you regularly use the telephone whilst keying or writing, you should use a headset to avoid awkward positioning of your neck.



## h. Regular Breaks

After following the guidelines listed above you should be seated at your workstation with the optimal posture for most people. However, no posture is ideal indefinitely. The most important thing you can do to reduce the risk of injury and ensure proper blood flow is to take regular breaks from your workstation. Where possible try to structure your work so regular breaks from your workstation are built into your work practices. For example time away from your work station to photocopy or collect printing. Walk to your colleagues' desk to ask a question rather than telephone or email, stand to read a document. Regular postural breaks also help to reduce any stiffness that may be experienced in the neck and shoulders. These can all be 'productive' breaks where work tasks may continue.



## **i. Hot Desking**

“Hot desking” means that users share a particular workstation with another employee, this is a common occurrence for job sharing, casual and relieving staff. It is very important that furniture and equipment is adjustable to fit the size, shape and set up preferences for as many users as possible. Key components to consider for hot desking workstations include:

- Minimise hot desking wherever possible
- Provide fully adjustable furniture and accessories including, desks, chairs, monitors, stands/document holders and footrests (staff may need to have specific accessories assigned to them or available when they change desks)
- Provide regular training for workers on how to adjust their workstation
- Remind staff to adjust their workstation and establish this as common practice at the start of the work day.
- Provide suitable cleaning material to enable standard precautions for infection control e.g. to wipe down workstation, keyboards, phones/headsets, mouse and shared equipment.

## **j. Lighting**

Good lighting in the workplace enables staff to see clearly and perform their work safely. Good lighting should enable employees to easily view their work and environment without the need to strain their eyes. Different activities require different levels and qualities of light.

Light is measured in lux and in most office environments the lux level is adequate for office tasks.

**Lighting and Glare** – Glare is caused by light shining directly onto your screen. Sources of light include windows and interior lights. To test if you have glare on your computer screen, turn off your monitor. If there are reflections on the blank screen, you have glare.

To reduce the glare caused by window light, position your monitor so that your line of sight is parallel to the window; if this is not practical consider covering the window fully or partially. If interior lighting is causing the glare, the lights may be shaded/redirected to reduce glare.

## **k. Noise**

Office noise is generally “annoyance” noise that is distracting and/or interferes with concentration.

Consider the following options to address “annoyance” noise:

- Rearrange the office layout so the noise generating activities or equipment is separated from quiet tasks e.g. locate meeting rooms and lunchrooms etc. as far away from workstations as possible.
- Isolate noisy, high use photocopiers/shredders.
- Select equipment with low noise output – consider noise when purchasing new equipment.
- Noise ‘barriers’ can help contain noise to a particular area e.g. fabric covered room dividers placed around a group of work stations.
- Lower the volume setting on telephones – including personal mobile phones
- Consider co-workers when using radios/playing music at your work station
- Be considerate with speaking volume.





## I. Layout of the Workplace

The layout of the workplace should be sufficient to allow people to enter and exit the workplace and to move about within the workplace without risk to health and safety, both under normal working conditions and in an emergency.

## 8. Resources

- a. [Office Ergonomics Self-Assessment Checklist](#)
- b. [Office Ergonomics Information Session](#)
- c. [Safe Use of Laptops Fact Sheet](#)
- d. [Office Workstations Fact Sheet - Workplace Health and Safety Queensland](#)
- e. [DETE Procedure – Reasonable Adjustment](#)
- f. [Quick Reference – Checking Your Workstation](#)

## 9. Definitions

**Ergonomics** – The science of designing tasks, jobs, information, tools, equipment, facilities and the working environment to enable people to perform tasks in a safe, effective, productive and comfortable environment.

**Musculoskeletal Disorder** – an injury to, or disease of, the musculoskeletal system, whether occurring suddenly or over a prolonged period of time.

**Reasonable Adjustment** - Where adjustments are made to a position, an employment practice, the workplace or work-related environment are to ensure equal opportunity for people with a disability to perform the inherent requirements of the position without imposing unjustifiable hardship on the organisation.

## 10. Contacts

- [Regional Injury Management Consultants](http://education.qld.gov.au/health/contacts/contacts-rehab.html) (<http://education.qld.gov.au/health/contacts/contacts-rehab.html>)
- [Senior Health and Safety Consultants](http://education.qld.gov.au/health/contacts/hscontacts.html) (<http://education.qld.gov.au/health/contacts/hscontacts.html>)
- [Purchasing and Procurement Services](#) – for Departmental Preferred Supplier Arrangement for *Workplace Assessment and Ergonomics Training Providers DETSOA100983* - Refer to the [Price Guide](#) for whole of state providers, region specific providers and associated costs.



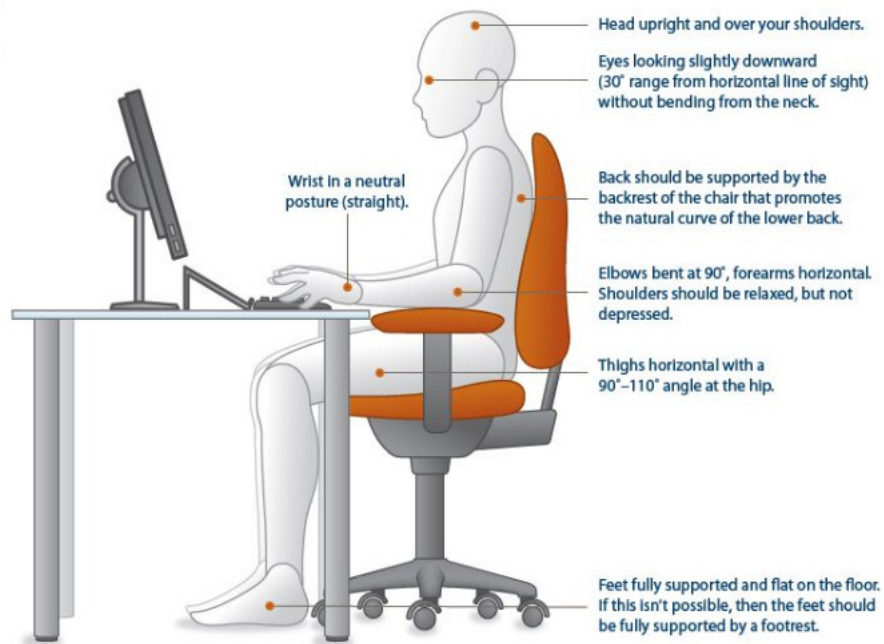
# Quick Reference – Checking Your Workstation Set-up



Setting up your workstation properly encourages good posture and minimises risk of discomfort and injury.

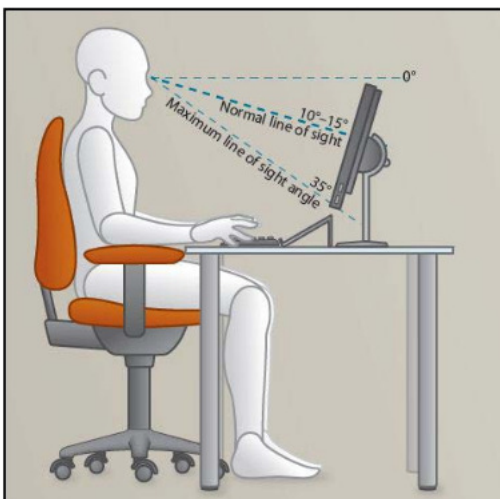
Adjust your chair to achieve comfortable working posture as shown below:

- Elements include:
- Chair height
- Back rest
- Lumbar support
- Arm rests
- Seat pan/depth
- Stable base



Adjust your monitor to achieve a comfortable posture. This can be achieved through:

- Appropriate distance - consider your vision, font size and screen resolution.
- Height and Location – monitor directly in front with top of monitor at eye level.



Organise your desk/work surface in as illustrated below. Keep frequently used items close to you and within easy reach. Take opportunities to change posture e.g. stand to access items that are in the non-working area.

