

## THINKING ERGONOMICALLY

Ergonomics is the study of the relationship between people and their workplace. Its fundamental purpose is to improve the work environment in order to reduce unnecessary stress and strain on the human body. Ergonomics has now come to include not only the workplace, but any environment where one may do a task or activity: the home, the workshop, driving the car, and so on. Whatever environment one is in, being aware of body positioning and continually seeking to improve the design of the environment to minimize stress and strain on the body will help to ensure a healthy spine.

The following are some key points to remember when learning to "think ergonomically":

- Whenever possible, position your environment to reduce strain on your body rather than straining your body to accommodate the environment. For example, if you work at a desk, do not place heavy objects that you regularly use (like heavy files or books) in the drawer on the side of the desk. In order to get them you are forced to bend and twist at the same time, a motion responsible for many back disorders. To avoid chronic neck and upper back problems, position computer and T.V. monitors so that, when sitting normally, you are not forced to look down. Adjust your environment to ensure your body positioning and motions are balanced.
- Be "posturally aware" at all times. Posture is vital to spinal well-being and health in general. Think optimum, balanced posture as it relates to everything you do. Question how you can improve your work or leisure environment so that optimum posture can be best maintained. For example, does your environment allow you to "think tall"?
- Design your environment so that your three basic spinal curves are maintained as close to normal as possible. While you are sitting or standing, does your environment force you to slouch, rounding your mid-back and pushing your head forward? When you sit, is your back supported so that the normal arc is maintained without you feeling strain? Do your job or recreational activities require you to look down or bend forward for prolonged periods?
- When lifting heavy objects or a small child remember to bend at the knees and lift with your legs rather than leveraging with bending forward at the waist. Do not combine the motions of bending at the waist and twisting at the same time; instead rotate your entire torso after you have finished lifting with your legs.

Focusing on postural awareness will not only strengthen your core muscles but will prevent unwanted injury and pain. Remember that the simplest remedy is in prevention!

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