

SITTING TO WORK

A BRIEF GUIDE



WORKING SPACE

THE PROBLEM OF SITTING

Most of us sit too much and we do it badly. The human body isn't designed for long periods of seated work and typical chairs and workstation furniture make it impossible to achieve a balanced and healthy sitting posture.

We provide ergonomic furniture solutions which allow people to sit better and to sit less. This document provides a brief guide to the important issues.



NATURAL SPACE

The body functions well when it is allowed to occupy its natural space, so that the spine, joints and organs can work freely. Compressing the body into a smaller space creates postural strain. Extreme examples of postural strain are the common problems of pain in the back, neck and arms, but it also affects our breathing and digestion and the efficiency of the nervous system.

A common sight in every office. This body is out of balance and collapsed downwards. The imbalance starts with the seat height and angle. Because the worktop height is too low, the trunk is then collapsed further to allow the arms and eyes to relate to the task. We learn to sit like this in school: by the time we begin our working life we regard it as normal.



CREATING THE SPACE

To achieve natural space for the body when sitting to work we must deal with three essential points: sitting balance, working height and working angle.

Sitting balance

Sitting to work requires an active sitting posture but most of us habitually adopt a slouched, passive position. A typical work chair's seat slopes backwards: this holds us away from the work and causes us to bend the spine forward to compensate.

Working height

Most of us work at desks of "standard height" but there is no "standard person". A desk which is too low or too high increases postural strain. This is much more important than is generally understood.

Working angle

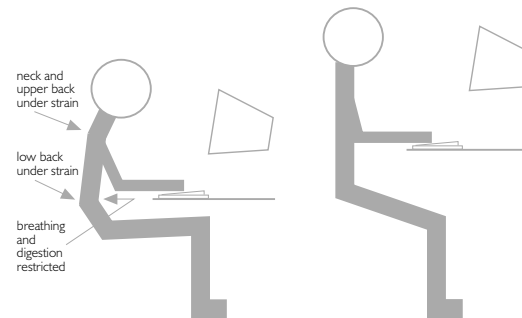
In writing and reading tasks a flat worksurface forces us to bend forward to accommodate the eye. A sloping surface (15–18 degrees is appropriate) inclines the work towards the eye so that forward bending is unnecessary. In computer-based work the screen must be positioned to avoid strain.

TYPICAL AND NATURAL

The diagrams on this page illustrate typical and natural sitting positions for computer work and paperwork tasks.

In each case the typical sitting posture involves a distortion of natural balance, a much greater load on the spine, and damaging tension in the neck, shoulders and arms. The natural posture uses balance and the body's natural support mechanisms, minimises effort and allows the hands and arms to work freely.

Computer tasks

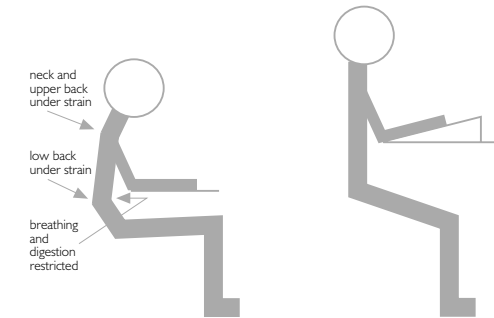


TYPICAL

NATURAL

The typical sitting posture results from a standard backward-sloping seat angle, unsuitable keyboard height, screen height and angle. The ideal sitting balance is achieved with correct seat height and forward-sloping seat angle (+10 degrees), correct keyboard height, screen height and angle

Paperwork tasks



TYPICAL

NATURAL

The typical sitting posture results from a standard backward-sloping seat angle, low desk height and flat worksurface. The ideal sitting balance is achieved with correct seat height and forward-sloping seat angle (+10 degrees), correct desk height and angle.

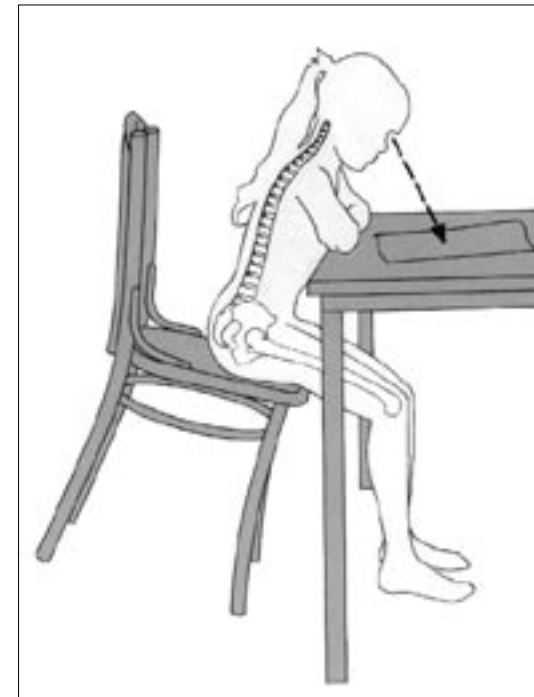
CHAIRS AND STRAIN

Most chair designs encourage postural strain because they ignore the way the human body really works. Most of us are so used to this that we regard it as normal but it is certainly not natural.

Look at the illustration on the right. The child has tipped the chair forward to maintain the natural alignment of pelvis and spine. A proper working chair has seat angle adjustment which enables us to achieve this active, balanced position with ease and stability.

To be effective, seat angle adjustment must provide 10 degrees of “forward-tilt” (measured from true horizontal) and it must pivot from the front of the seat rather than the centre – this allows the seat angle to change independently of seat height. The ideal chair will also provide extensive backrest adjustment and encourage movement and variety by allowing easy movement between active and more passive positions.

Children often tip their chair forward in order to achieve a comfortable relationship with their work. A proper work chair allows us to achieve this balanced position with ease and stability.



CHOOSING A WORK CHAIR

A lot of nonsense is talked about chairs. All sorts of things are claimed for them, as if a chair can itself change the way we sit. Chairs don't sit – people sit, and no chair can do all the work of sitting for the user. A good chair is simply one which allows us to sit well for a particular purpose: a good chair creates choice, it allows us to sit naturally and efficiently.

There are many work chairs available which are described as “ergonomic”: some are simply awful, most are mediocre. There are a few good work chairs and one or two which are outstanding. It is those outstanding designs which interest us.



SIT-STAND WORKING

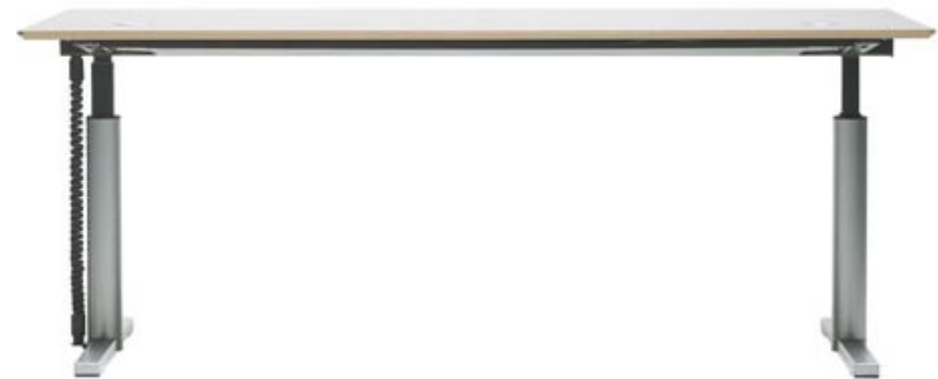
We can use the best work chair available, we can use it well and considerably reduce the strain of sitting, but it can't change one fundamental point: we simply aren't made for long periods of seated work. The body thrives on movement and variety: this is why sedentary and repetitive tasks can be so damaging.

A sit-stand work table gives us the freedom to work seated or standing and to change between the two as often as we wish. It also allows us to adjust quickly and easily for the task (computer work and paperwork require different working heights).

Changing frequently between sitting and standing minimises tension and strain. We should ideally change be-

tween the two every twenty minutes or so.

We have a number of sit-stand solutions, some costing little more than a good work chair. When adjusted to sitting height they look like any other modern desk or work table, but their special functionality can transform our experience of working.



WORKING SPACE

We provide ergonomic furniture solutions which minimise the postural strain associated with sitting to work. This may involve an individual client working in a home office or multiple users in an orthodox office space.

Our solutions aren't confined to typical computer and paperwork tasks: our clients include sculptors and painters, jewellers and watchmakers, laboratory workers and others engaged in specialised tasks. We also have a particular interest in solutions for all levels of education.

We offer outstanding chairs and adjustable workstation furniture and we guide our clients in getting the best from them.

WORKING SPACE

& ALTERNATIVE SITTING

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