

Before you begin:

Look around for hazards that can cause ergonomic injuries. There may be obvious hazards, such as lifting heavy boxes of copy paper. Other hazards may be less obvious, such as the hazards of prolonged sitting.



Introduction

Ergonomics is the field that uses information about people to design things that are comfortable and easy to use. Things like work areas and workstations, including offices.

Definitions

- **Glare:** too much or too bright light entering the eye, causing discomfort, or interfering with vision.
- **Prolonged sitting:** sitting for long periods of time (hours, not minutes) with little or no movement.

Discussion

Ergonomics can help increase comfort and productivity in your office. Of course, the first step is having an ergonomic computer workstation to avoid uncomfortable postures (See Computer Workstation Ergonomics Safety Talk). Then consider how long you sit. Prolonged sitting has gotten a lot of attention recently. Research suggests that sitting for more than three or four hours at a stretch is bad for your health. Sitting increases the stress on the spine, so over the long run, prolonged sitting can lead to back pain. Other long-term effects of prolonged sitting including increased risk of obesity, heart disease, and diabetes.

Sit/stand desks are suggested as a solution to prolonged sitting. But here's a simpler (and cheaper) solution: MOVE. Literally. Get up out of your chair and take a short walk. Just a minute or two is enough. The trick is to do this often – after 20 or 30 minutes of sitting.

Because most office work is sedentary, people usually don't think of the dangers of overexertion. But every office has large or heavy things that need to be moved: boxes of paper or desks and file cabinets. Overexertion occurs when a person does a job that is beyond their physical capability. Backs and shoulders are common sites of overexertion injuries. The key to avoiding overexertion is to size up the job first and get help if needed. Look for any obstacles that could trip you up such as extension cords or an uneven floor. Most importantly – don't rush! Moving fast is riskier than moving slowly. If you're doing lots of heavy work, take frequent breaks to catch your breath and let your muscles rest.

Lighting is important for both comfort and performance. We need the right amount of light for the job at hand. Older workers often need more light than younger ones, especially for reading fine print. But too much light can be as bothersome as too little. Supply task lights at each desk so workers can set their own lighting levels. Be on the lookout for glare, especially glare on monitors that can come from brightly lit windows or overhead ceiling lights. Window shades can reduce glare on sunny days. To tackle glare from ceiling lights, change the tilt angle of the monitors or reposition them. Another choice is to put baffles over the ceiling lights to diffuse them.

Air flow is often overlooked as a source of discomfort. In the summer when air conditioning is common, overhead vents that blow cold air directly on you can be annoying, especially if the cold air blows on your neck or shoulders. Air flow can also cause dry eyes, especially if humidity levels are low. Dry eyes are a problem when spending long hours on a computer. See if maintenance can install diverters to redirect the air flow away from your workstation. Taking short but frequent breaks from the computer can help restore moisture to your eyes. If that doesn't work, ask your eye doctor for suggestions.

The **20-20-20 Rule** can help with combating some of the ill effects of office work:

Every **20 minutes**: Stand up and take a **20 second** stretch break and look at something that is 20 feet away.

This can help your back, your eyes, and your mind. The net result is less fatigue and more comfort. You'll be more productive too.

Conclusion

Wellness and ergonomics in the office can help improve health, comfort, and productivity. Pay attention to things such as lighting, air flow, and storage of heavy items to reduce the risk of injury and improve your comfort levels. Prolonged sitting is also hazardous to your health when it occurs over the course of years. Short-circuit this hazard by incorporating frequent but brief episodes of movement, such as walking around, throughout your workday.

Group Activity

Discuss where and when overexertion injuries could happen. What can you do to reduce the risk of injuries?

Brainstorm ways to reduce prolonged sitting. What's the best way to incorporate the 20-20-20 Rule? Are "walking" meetings practical? How about mid-morning and mid-afternoon group stretching exercise?

Resources

[CDC/NIOSH: Office Environment](#)

[eTools: Computer Workstations | Occupational Safety and Health Administration \(osha.gov\)](#)

[Office Ergonomics : OSH Answers \(ccohs.ca\)](#)



Bureau of Workers'
Compensation

Governor Mike DeWine
Administrator/CEO John Logue

We've got you covered

www.bwc.ohio.gov



12/22/2022