



Health & Safety Team, Edinburgh Napier University

using a computer – advice on safe use for students



Chair

You should have a swivel chair which is in good condition. The back height and tilt, seat height and tilt, should be fully adjustable, with the seat slide where fitted, adjusted to support your legs.

Adjust the angle and height of your back-rest. It should support your lower back. Adjust the tilt of your seat so that your body is inclined slightly forwards. This encourages you to sit upright, and keep your back straight. There should be a space between the front edge of the chair and back of knee.

Adjust chair height so that your elbows are vertically under the shoulders when typing and your forearms and hands are horizontal when the fingers are touching the middle row of letters, with a right angle at the elbow.

Desk

Desktop layout must be set out properly with the screen and keyboard in front of you. If a document holder is required, it should be next to the screen and keyboard. Frequently used items should be close to you. Take notice of whether you are right or left handed and ensure you have space to the side for non-computer based work. Keep the area around and underneath your desk clear to allow you enough room to change position regularly.

Keyboard / mouse

The keyboard should be separate from the computer and screen and positioned so that you have some space in front of the keyboard to rest your hands when you are not typing. Adjust your keyboard so that your desk supports your wrists and forearms and the angle feels comfortable during use.

Aches and pains can be caused by keeping the fingers tensed and slightly raised from the mouse. Maintain the natural drop from the shoulders to avoid muscle ache, tuck the elbow into the side of the body and keep your wrist flat. Alternatives to the conventional mouse are available.

Screen / Display

Adjust your screen position, so that your eyes look down on it from an angle of around 15 to 20 degrees (slightly below eye level). Adjust the viewing angle of the screen to minimise reflections and glare.

Fatigue

Long periods of intense use can lead to tiredness, eyestrain and increased stress levels. Work so that there are breaks or changes of activity. Short, frequent breaks are better than longer, less frequent ones.

It is recommended that all users exercise frequently to avoid muscular fatigue. Neck circles, shoulder raises, flexing of arms and legs, rotation of ankles and wrists, and stretching of all the fingers are all common exercises that can prove beneficial. These exercises can be done quite easily at the workstation, and take only a few minutes.

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mobile devices



New smaller and more portable devices such as laptops, tablets and smartphones are supposed to make work easier, more accessible and therefore make us more productive. However, because it is harder to find a good posture to use these devices, the risk to the user of discomfort, fatigue and therefore reduced productivity is increased and needs to be managed.

Laptops

- Appropriate laptop bag to reduce risk of manual handling injury
- Don't work for long periods with your laptop on your lap / in comfy furniture such as a sofa / just before you go to sleep

Tablets

- Best used as supplementary devices for travelling or specific tasks such as browsing, emails and note-taking
- Vary the hand you hold the tablet in
- Vary the position of the hand on the tablet and the way the device is held
- Don't use the device for too long at any one time

Smartphones

- Size and method of operation don't lend themselves to long term comfortable working
- Intensive stress on small tendons and muscles
- Should be held in one hand and operated using the fingers on the other hand

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