

CHOOSING THE RIGHT ERGONOMIC CHAIR

Today many people sit for the majority of their waking hours. They sit whilst having breakfast, travelling to work, at school, in meetings, in the office, operating machinery, eating dinner or watching television.

Although sitting requires less physical effort than standing it actually places greater strain on the lower back & pressure on the discs in the spine. People can spend up to 8-12 hours each day seated whilst at work. To avoid chronic back problems it is essential that you are seated in the correct position & sitting on a good ergonomic chair where possible.

What type of chair is best?

There are many types of 'ergonomic' chairs available for use in the office, factory or at home. The selection of a suitable chair is essential to enable a comfortable working posture & prevent ongoing problems. No one type of chair is necessarily the best, but there are several important features to look for in a good ergonomic chair.

The users' body dimensions must be considered when selecting a chair. Particular consideration needs to be given to those people who are at the extreme ends of body dimensions (for example very tall, short or overweight), or who may have a disability or injury.

What to consider before buying a new chair

When considering purchasing a chair, there are a number of features that are mandatory, regardless of how you intend to use the chair:

- Correct seating posture should be able to be maintained over long periods of time.
- Seat height & seat tilt should be easily adjustable when seated in the chair.
- The seat should tilt forwards & backwards and have a waterfall front edge to maximise blood circulation in the thighs and legs.
- Lower back support in an ergonomic chair is very important. The lumbar support should be adjustable in height & angle & should support the curve in the lower back. This should be easily adjusted whilst seated in the chair.
- If the chair has armrests these should be height adjustable. Any armrests should not impede access to the desk. Armrests are not recommended for those who do manipulative tasks such as keyboard work as they interfere with arm movements.



- A free float or synchronised mechanism is best.
- Fabric should be fire retardant (preferably of a woollen woven fabric) that is durable and that breathes.
- The chair should swivel a full 360°.
- The chair should have a 5 base support to enable stability & prevent the likelihood of the chair tipping over.
- If using on hard floor surfaces glides should be fitted rather than castors.

Try before you buy

A five-minute test run is not enough. Ask for a trial chair to be made available for use over a one or two day period in the real work situation. Use this time to learn how to operate the chair and adjust it to fit the worker correctly. Make sure that the chair meets the needs of the worker & their job before any final selection is made. Getting a professional in to ensure the chair is suitable is a great idea.

Other things that can be done to improve office safety for workers:

1. Start an ergonomic awareness programme. Educate staff about all the functions of their chair or workstations and the basics of ergonomics. This way they will understand how and why the equipment and chair works as it does & be more inclined to take a proactive approach to injury prevention.
2. Conduct a workplace assessment. Rearranging layouts could be an immediate solution; ensure that workers are sitting on suitable chairs and at workstations that are 'ergonomically' designed.
3. Plan for the future by selecting workstations and office chair designs that suit the requirements of the office situation and that adjust to the physical differences of users and the task.
4. Remember that the chair is only one of the components to be considered in workstation design. All the elements such as the chair, footrest, work surface, document holders, lighting & so on need to be considered & determined as suitable for the workspace & work task.
5. If in doubt contact a professional who can conduct the entire safety program or at least give some advice & information to ensure a suitable plan is put in place.



For more information on choosing the right chair for you or about what you can do to improve workplace safety please contact Worksafe Fitness.

www.worksafefitness.com.au or e-mail at info@worksafefitness.com.au

Reference: User Checklist For Ergonomic Design of Adjustable Chairs
Worksafe Australia, National Occupational Health & Safety Commission