Back pain in the workplace

It’s not always possible to avoid back pain. The spine is a complex structure that plays a central role in supporting, moving and protecting our bodies. Back pain doesn’t always have an obvious cause — there are many risk factors to consider: posture, ergonomics, exercise and poor movement.

Back pain in the workplace*

- Around 2.5 million people experience back pain every day in the UK
- 1 in 5 back pain sufferers have given up their job or reduced hours to cope with their condition
- Treating back pain costs the NHS £1 billion a year
- 63% of managers experience back pain once a month, compared with 53% of manual workers - with many citing poor posture and sedentary lifestyles as a cause
- 48% said they’ve been in pain for more than five years

Check your workstation ergonomics

- Arms relaxed by your side
- Balanced head, not leaning forward
- Screen approximately arm's length from you
- Forearms parallel to desk
- Top of screen about eye level
- Sit back in the chair with back rest adjusted suitably
- Feet supported on the floor or on a footrest
Become an active worker

Use a sit-stand desk

Regular stretching and moving breaks

Use a chair with a movement mechanism so you can rock while you sit

Walk, yoga, or sports on your lunch break

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Make sure your monitors are adjusted properly

- Your eyes should be level with the top part of your screen
- Sit about an arm’s length away from your screen
- Place your main monitor directly in front of you to reduce twisting
- Make sure there’s no glare from light sources
Use an ergonomic chair

Ergonomic chairs typically come with a range of adjustment features so you can position each part according to your body’s proportions.

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Try a compact keyboard and vertical mouse

While it may not feel like your mouse or keyboard have anything to do with your back, the positioning and design of both of these accessories will affect the way your body is positioned.

Compact keyboard
Eliminates number pad to create shorter board to reduce the distance to your mouse and keep your forearms perpendicular to your body.

Vertical mouse
Positions your forearm in a neutral handshake position (rather than twisting as with a standard mouse) to improve your alignment.

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Check your lumbar support

Not all chairs have sufficient lower back support, which over time can make you feel achy and even cause injury. If your chair back is too flat, try adding a lumbar roll. A lumbar roll is designed to sit in the inward curve of your lower back to improve sitting posture.
Pick up healthy working habits

Learn about good sitting postures for all the devices you use. If you use laptops or handheld devices, make sure you limit your usage or use suitable equipment like laptop and tablet stands.

Good laptop position

- Top of screen at eye level, an arm’s length away
- Balanced head, not hanging forward
- Forearms parallel to desk, relaxed by side
- Sit back in chair for better back support
- Space behind knees
- Feet supported on the floor or on a footrest

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Embrace agile working

Agile working encourages movement between different environments, which can help prevent sedentary behaviour. When care is taken not to sit in poor postures for long periods of time, the risk of any kind of musculoskeletal disorder is reduced.

Some of the benefits of moving between environments ~ throughout the day include:

- Reduce risk of coronary heart disease
- Prevent musculoskeletal problems
- Reduce blood pressure
- Reduce high cholesterol
- Improve mental health
- Concentrate for longer
- Be more productive
- Get a better sleep

Useful resources

https://www.ninds.nih.gov/Disorders/Patient-Caregiver-Education/Fact-Sheets/Low-Back-Pain-Fact-Sheet


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