

# WORKPLACE FIXES TO KEEP OFFICE WORKERS' BACKS, SHOULDERS, NECKS, WRISTS AND EYES HAPPY & HEALTHY

## POSTERS

The mini-posters describe what we can do to reduce fatigue, discomfort, MSD and improve effectiveness during office (and home) work.

- 1 OFFICE ERGONOMICS
- 2 WORKING POSITIONS
- 3 SUPPORT THE BODY
- 4 SUPPORT THE ARMS
- 5 SEE
- 6 REACH
- 7 WORK SHOULDN'T HURT

The posters describes common hazards found in Office work that can lead to MSD. They also give ideas on how to fix the work. You may recognize some or all of the hazards shown. This tells you that your workspace would benefit from MSD prevention actions.

## HOW TO USE THE POSTERS

- Use the posters as guides during walkthroughs and inspections. On the back of the poster, write observations and ideas about possible fixes for hazards.
- Use the posters as a script to aid workers, supervisors and others during training and safety talks. Use the discussion to brainstorm possible fixes.
- Use the posters in the lunchroom or on the Health & Safety board to alert workers to potential MSD hazards in their work and their relationship to pain and discomfort.
- Keep looking for improvements!

**Authorship:** This document has been written by the Centre of Research Expertise for the Prevention of Musculoskeletal Disorders (CRE-MSD) in collaboration with multiple researchers and workplace stakeholders. ([www.CRE-MSD.uwaterloo.ca](http://www.CRE-MSD.uwaterloo.ca))

**Disclaimers:** The information provided is based upon best current knowledge and is intended to help workplaces reduce MSD. The information and opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of CRE-MSD, the Ministry of Labour or the Province of Ontario.

## WHAT DO THE COLOURS ON THE POSTERS MEAN?

**GREEN** – No action required if tasks are not held or repeated for long periods and no MSD symptoms are reported. Continue to monitor for MSD symptoms and check after workplace or process changes.

**YELLOW** – Investigations and improvement needed in the longer term. Investigation and improvement needed immediately if MSD symptoms are present.

**ORANGE** – Further assessment or improvement needed immediately.

## NEED MORE HELP?

This guide was primarily written for small businesses and its goal is to provide basic information to encourage firms to get started on preventing MSD. Larger organizations may also find it useful for training or safety talks. It is part of a larger resource: *The MSD Prevention Guideline for Ontario* ([www.msdpreservation.com](http://www.msdpreservation.com)). The website includes a wide range of resources to help organizations of all sizes prevent MSD.

For non-office work, a *Quick Start Guide: General* is available at: <https://www.msdpreservation.com/Quick-Start-Guide.htm>.

The Ontario Ministry of Labour has partners in many sectors who can provide resources and can answer your questions: [www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/websites.php](http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/websites.php)

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety has pages dedicated to the prevention of MSD: [www.ccohs.ca/topics/hazards/ergonomic](http://www.ccohs.ca/topics/hazards/ergonomic)

The Association of Canadian Ergonomists (ACE) is a bilingual, professional association of individuals and organizations with a common interest in advancing ergonomics and human factors knowledge and practice: <https://ergonomicscanada.ca/en>

Contact a Canadian Certified Professional Ergonomist: <https://ergonomicscanada.ca/en/our-profession/certification>

The Canadian Standards Association (CSA) recently published a new guide: *Office ergonomics - An application standard for workplace ergonomics*. It can be accessed through a public library system or purchased from CSA.

For questions, comments and suggestions, please contact: [info@msdpreservation.com](mailto:info@msdpreservation.com)

## Quick Start Guide: Office

# Office work shouldn't hurt

Back pain, sore necks and other Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSD) are a major cause of workers' disability and costs to workers, business and society. Eliminating and reducing MSD hazards at the office is one part of creating a safe workplace. Small changes at work can make a big difference in preventing the development of MSD.

Most people use computers in their work and at home. They use desktop computers, laptops, touch pads, tablets and cell phones. They work with them in offices, but also in warehouses, restaurants, automobiles, construction sites and at home. For simplicity, we will call all of these situations "Office Work". The goal of "Office Ergonomics" is to improve health and effectiveness during office work.

This Guide contains workplace fixes to help keep backs, shoulders, necks, wrists and eyes happy & healthy during office work. It was written mainly for small businesses. Its goal is to provide basic information and encourage firms to get started on preventing MSD at work. It is a part of a larger resource: *The MSD Prevention Guideline for Ontario* ([www.msdpreservation.com](http://www.msdpreservation.com)). For non-office work, see the companion resource, *Quick Start Guide: General*.

### JOHN'S SORE NECK WAS GETTING WORSE...

After talking with his boss who had reviewed the *Quick Start Guide: Office*, John realized that he was leaning forward in his chair in order to see better and his head was tilted backwards in a "pigeon neck" posture. The *Quick Start Guide* helped them both understand the underlying problems: the computer screen was positioned too far away when it should have been at arm's length from John's eyes. The screen also wasn't at eye height, which allows for a downward gaze and therefore a reduction in fatigue and discomfort in both the neck and eyes.

To make matters worse, when John's boss asked about the last time he had had his prescription updated, John realized that his bifocals were an old prescription. After readjusting the computer screen distance and height and getting an updated prescription suitable for computer work, John's neck felt better.

**Note:** Employers have a legal responsibility to provide a safe workplace under the Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act. This includes improving the workplace and putting in place measures to protect workers from all hazards, including those related to musculoskeletal disorders.



For more info visit:  
[msdpreservation.com](http://msdpreservation.com)

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Centre of Research  
Expertise for the  
Prevention of  
Musculoskeletal Disorders

Work  
shouldn't  
hurt

## MYTHS

**MYTH:** There is a “correct” posture for office work: sit up straight!

**FACT:** There are many good working positions for office work.

**MYTH:** Sitting at work is more of a problem than standing at work.

**FACT:** Many people have more difficulties standing. Total sitting time, at work **and** at home is the bigger problem.

**MYTH:** Buying Sit-to-Stand desks prevents MSD at the office.

**FACT:** These desks can help some workers in certain jobs if combined with proper training.

**MYTH:** All office workers need new desks and chairs.

**FACT:** Adjusting or modifying existing equipment and adding some simple fixes (e.g. adjusting chair height) can address many MSD office hazards.

**MYTH:** Workers should not have pain or discomfort if they have ergonomic desks and chairs.

**FACT:** Even with good adjustable furniture and equipment, doing a single task in a single position creates fatigue and discomfort. How work is organized—tasks, breaks and supervision—is also critical to preventing MSD.

## MAKING A START

Starting is the most important part of reducing back pain, sore necks, tired eyes and other Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSD).

A workplace free of MSD hazards protects workers from injuries, lets injured workers return to their jobs more easily and allows people with varying abilities to continue working: male or female; old or young; tall or short. For workers who have had an injury or illness – including MSD – a health care professional could use the materials in this guide as a starting point and adapt the recommendations appropriately.

This *Quick Start Guide: Office* and the companion *Quick Start Guide: General* will give businesses a good start.

### ACTIONS

- Jump straight in. Start using these posters in your workplace inspections and safety talks and then make changes to remove or reduce any hazards found.
- Follow the 10 steps on the facing page for a more systematic approach.

Some of the ideas presented in the mini-posters may seem simple, but you can substantially reduce MSD hazards by applying these ideas throughout your office (and home).

## SET UP A STANDARD OFFICE WORKSTATION

*There is no single “correct” working position that fits everybody’s work tasks and body and allows comfort for extended periods of time.*

- Workers should receive training from their employer on how to adjust their office equipment.
- Workers should get their eyesight checked and corrected if necessary. If vision is not corrected for screen-based tasks, the following steps may not be effective in preventing fatigue and discomfort.
- A chair with adjustability is an important component of an office setup. It lets workers fit their workstation to their body and work: Feet on floor (or foot support), sit back on the seat, no pressure behind the knees, backrest with slight lean backwards, support for the low back (lumbar) area.
- Modify or adjust the furniture to place the keyboard at about elbow level with the mouse close to the side of the keyboard. The goal is to have the forearms approximately horizontal, with the wrists straight and not bent back.
- Modify or adjust the furniture or equipment to position the top of the screen at or below eye level and about an arm’s length away.
- Set the lighting, computer and display settings to give sharp, good-sized text, good contrast and no glare.
- All the parts of the workstation have to work together: After adjusting the individual parts of workstation, fine-tune the setup so the workstation fits your body and tasks.

These steps are a good start but for comfortable and effective office work with computers, workers should also be able to:

- Look away from the screen often and perform non-screen based tasks to help reduce discomfort in the eyes and body, e.g., walk to the printer. These introduce breaks and pauses into work. Stretching can help too.
- Change your activity or posture when you feel they need to, but remember, fatigue creeps up slowly on you, so *Move early—before you feel fatigue—and move often.*

## MSD PREVENTION IN 10 STEPS

### 1 MANAGEMENT COMMITMENT & LEADERSHIP

### 2 WORKERS’ PARTICIPATION

### 3-4 FIND PROBLEMS

- Add MSD related hazards to walkthrough inspections.
- Use workers’ reports of effort, pain and discomfort to help identify tasks with MSD hazards. Use previous injury reports.
- For a worker who has reported pain or MSD, perform an incident investigation of their work tasks.
- Get to the root or underlying cause of the MSD hazard.

### 5 PLAN TO FIX PROBLEMS

- Talk to workers to identify solutions to reduce or eliminate MSD hazards.
- Prioritize workplace changes over less effective worker-focused solutions: e.g., adjustable furniture rather than “sitting up straight”.
- Before making a permanent change, test the fix, e.g., get a chair or docking station on a trial basis from a distributor.
- Be prepared to try a few fixes to find the right one for your workplace.

### 6-7 FIX PROBLEMS

- Make the change, but expect an adjustment period and possible effects on other processes.
- Give changes a fair trial by allowing workers to learn and become proficient with them before deciding on their effectiveness.

### 8 CHECK EFFECTIVENESS OF CONTROLS

- Check whether the changes have removed the original hazards and improved the work.
- Determine if the changes have introduced new hazards.

### 9 DOCUMENT LESSONS LEARNED

These steps are expanded upon in the Basic and Comprehensive Step-by-Step Guidelines:  
<https://www.msdpredvention.com>

**SHOW COMMITMENT TO A SAFE WORKPLACE BY GETTING TOGETHER WITH WORKERS TO ELIMINATE MSD HAZARDS AND IMPROVE HEALTH.**

### 10 FOLLOW UP

- If the changes are not working, return to step number 5, PLAN TO FIX PROBLEMS.
- Consider asking for outside help if either the problem or solution are unclear. See “NEED MORE HELP”.