Tips for a Healthy Work Experience

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Eyestrain? Sore back? It is amazing how making even small tweaks to furnishings or work habits can make you more comfortable and energized over a long work day. To reduce your risk of injury, and improve your performance no matter where you work, consider these practical ergonomic tips.

1. Adjust Your Immediate Surroundings

Start with a good chair. Stick with proper ergonomic seating products. Anything else greatly increases your chance of injury or muscle strain. Choose a flexible agile seating experience that supports a range of postures and your need to shift between different tasks. Adjust the seat so your feet are flat on the floor. For a change of pace and a bit more comfort, move to a sofa, club chair or other soft seating while reviewing documents or making calls.
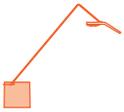
See the light. Lighting needs to be balanced for the task at hand. An adjustable task light will allow you to fine tune illumination for desktop projects as well as minimize glare, reducing eyestrain and headaches. To avoid glare on the screen, position the light to the side of the monitor, rather than behind or in front of it. For video calls, optimize visibility by having the light come in front of you, rather than from a window behind you.

Position your screen correctly. To reduce eyestrain, position your screen at least 20-30 inches from your face (an arm's length). To decrease neck strain, the screen should be centered directly in front of you at eye height and tilted up a bit so that the screen surface is perpendicular to your face. Investing in a high-quality monitor arm will let you make these adjustments with ease. Adding a second monitor can increase productivity up to 50% and drastically lower the need to print.

Keep it clean. Whether you're working from home or at a shared workspace, wiping down surfaces and tools with disinfecting wipes before and after your work day lowers the risk of transmitting germs.

2. Incorporate Movement and Visual Breaks into Your Work Day

Keep moving. Take a short walk during your lunch break or before you hunker down in the morning. Use a wearable fitness device to remind you to stretch or do some yoga poses every hour. Try standing during virtual and/or quick meetings, and walking during phone calls. Build in opportunities to use stairs or add a few more steps. Instead of a thermos of coffee that sits on your desk all day, use a mug that requires a trip back to the coffee pot for a refill. Even better: take a walk to your local café in the afternoon.

Vary your posture. Consider a sit-to-stand desk that allows you to switch positions and postures through the day. Adding an active seat allows you to perch in a posture between sitting and standing which encourages micro-movements that keep your blood flowing, body active and attention focused. For greater comfort and movement while standing, add a balance board to boost energy. An anti-fatigue standing mat supports hips and knees and helps keep posture in alignment. If a "sit-stand" option is not available, use a combination of worksurfaces that offer both seated and standing height work postures, such as a dining table and a bar-height counter.

Rest your eyes. When your eyes are focused on an object in the distance, they're meeting optical infinity, in which eyes are totally at rest. Practice the "20-20-20 rule." For 20 seconds every 20 minutes, take a break and look 20 feet away. Also, remember to blink more. People under normal conditions blink 12 to 15 times a minute, but those reading on a screen blink only seven times.

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3. Nourish Your Spirit with Connections to Nature

Soak up some sun. Sunlight, even filtered through a window, has been shown to improve mood. Try to situate your workspace so you have natural light streaming in. If that's not possible, walk around through the day or try working outdoors so you're exposed to daylight and nature.

Bring in plants. Plants reduce stress and create a feeling of well-being. Placing plants in or near your workspace can also help improve air quality and lower background noise.

Give yourself a view. A growing number of studies suggest that views to, or images of, nature boost memory and focus. If possible, select a work location with views to the outdoors and natural objects (trees, sky, clouds, greenery, etc.). If this is not possible, wood grain furniture and colors of nature such as blues and greens have been shown to boost productivity and creativity. Images of nature on your walls or screen saver can also provide similar benefits

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Takeaway: The tips above are basic guidelines to help ensure that your work environment, whether it's in the office, at home or elsewhere, is comfortable and supportive. Creating a workspace that builds healthy habits and supports how you work should be a priority no matter where you work.