

# Sit All Day? Watch Your Back!



Think you're safe from injury just sitting around? Wrong. Back pain isn't just a risk to construction and factory workers. Routine office work (sitting for hours at a desk or working on a computer) can cause and worsen back pain, especially if you fall into bad habits.

**Posture:** Sitting still for extended periods may cause aches and pains. Your body can tolerate about 20 minutes of sitting in one pose before your back muscles tire and tighten and you'll feel like shifting positions.

**If you must sit for long stretches...** Remember Mom's advice: Sit up straight! Poor posture stresses your back. When you slouch, you exaggerate your back's curvature, which can lead to muscle fatigue and injury. In contrast, good posture relaxes your muscles and requires minimal effort to balance your body. Here are some tips for sitting tall – and avoiding back pulls and pains:

- Choose a chair that supports your back and adjust it so that your feet rest flat on the floor.
- If your chair lacks lumbar support, place a rolled towel or small pillow behind your lower back.
- Remove bulky objects, such as an overstuffed wallet, from your back pockets when sitting. They may disrupt balance in your lower back.

**Adjust your work space.** Make sure that your computer monitor and chair are positioned properly:

- You should be able to see your monitor without lifting your chin. That means that the top edge of the screen should be roughly horizontal with your line of sight.
- Your keyboard should rest about an inch below your elbow height when sitting with good posture.

**Stretch during the day.** Here are some simple stretches you can do on the job:

- Scratch your back – Grab an elbow and lift it up to help your hand reach your mid-back. Hold for 15 seconds. Relax and repeat on the other side.
- Shoulder stretch – Lace your fingers together, turn your palms out and stretch your arms and hands outward/forward. Hold for 15 seconds. Relax and repeat.
- Upper back – Lace your fingers together behind your head, bringing your elbows as far back as possible. Inhale deeply and lean back until you feel your muscles stretching. Hold for 20 seconds. Exhale, relax and repeat.
- Back twist – Cross your right leg over the left. Put your left hand on your right knee, and gently pull toward your left side while slowly turning your head and shoulders to the right. Keep turning until you see the wall behind your right shoulder. Don't force the turn – just move until you feel a slight stretch in your back. Hold for eight to 10 seconds. Relax and repeat on the other side.

**Still Experiencing Pain on the Job?**

- Consider consulting your doctor, a physical therapist, or chiropractor about your posture, muscles and joints
- Inquire with your workplace about ergonomic assessments and/or desk modifications
- Stress can also cause your muscles to tense up and tighten, which can lead to back pain. Making sure you get enough rest and relaxation – and manage your stress – is key to warding off back pain.