

Healthy Computing for Adults



Adults of all ages spend many hours every day sitting at a desk or in front of a computer while they work and then go home to surf the Internet for pleasure or catch up with friends and family through e-mail messaging. How a person positions himself or herself in a chair, and how he or she uses the computer equipment can affect not only comfort, but also health and well-being.

Occupational therapists are trained to perform an “ergonomic” evaluation, or an evaluation that determines how well a person fits into his or her environment. A person who does not sit correctly in a chair or strains to use a computer may suffer back and neck pain and eyestrain. Most computer equipment and workstations are built to fit adults, but a few adjustments can be made to an adult’s work area to promote a healthy lifestyle free of pain.

What can an occupational therapist do?

- **Evaluate** a person’s current computer workstation setup to determine whether it is ergonomically correct to prevent unnecessary strain.
- **Advise** adults on what equipment can be used to create a healthy workstation, such as special keyboards, keyboard trays, document holders, footrests, and office chairs.
- **Educate** people and their employers about proper posture and movement to prevent injury and strain.
- **Teach** stretching exercises to do at home that support a healthy back.

What can a person do to prevent back and neck strain?

- **Encourage** proper posture of the head, forearms, back, and feet: The head should be level with the monitor and the top of the screen at eye level. The forearms should be parallel to the keyboard and held only slightly above it. The lower back should be supported while sitting in front of a computer. Place a small pillow or rolled up towel between the back of the chair and the lower back to provide back support. Feet should rest flat on the floor or on a footstep.
- **Arrange** computer desk and equipment so as to avoid glare from sunlight. Sit the monitor 18 to 30 inches away from the person.
- **Adjust** the chair to an appropriate height for the person.

Need more information?

Sitting properly at the computer is important to a person’s health. If you would like to consult an occupational therapist about an ergonomic evaluation, practitioners are available through most hospitals, community clinics, and medical centers.

Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants are trained in helping both adults and children with a broad range of physical, developmental, and psychological conditions. Practitioners also help clients in wellness techniques that may prevent injury and disease.