

## **Workplace Ergonomics Reference Guide 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition**

A Publication of the Computer/Electronic  
Accommodations Program

**Support. Equip. Empower.**

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## Introduction

Welcome to the *Workplace Ergonomics Reference Guide*. This is a publication of the Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program (CAP). This guide provides illustrations of proper workstation ergonomics and a checklist for implementation of these strategies as well as tips for prevention of repetitive stress injuries. Ensuring proper ergonomics in the workplace is a smart business decision because it increases employee productivity and satisfaction.

CAP works to ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to the information environment and opportunities in the Department of Defense and throughout the Federal Government. While CAP's focus is to provide assistive technology to accommodate people with a disabling condition, such as carpal tunnel syndrome (or other repetitive stress injuries), we prefer to take a proactive approach to these issues by educating our customers on prevention of the repetitive stress injuries that can result from workstations that lack proper ergonomic configuration. This strategy can diminish the severity of ergonomic-related injuries or eliminate the need for accommodation altogether.

After reviewing the *Workplace Ergonomics Reference Guide*, please consult the list of related organizations for additional information on workplace ergonomics. If you would like to speak to someone regarding an ergonomic needs assessment, please contact CAP's Technology & Evaluation Center (CAPTEC) at 703-693-5160 (Voice) or [cap.captec@mail.mil](mailto:cap.captec@mail.mil).

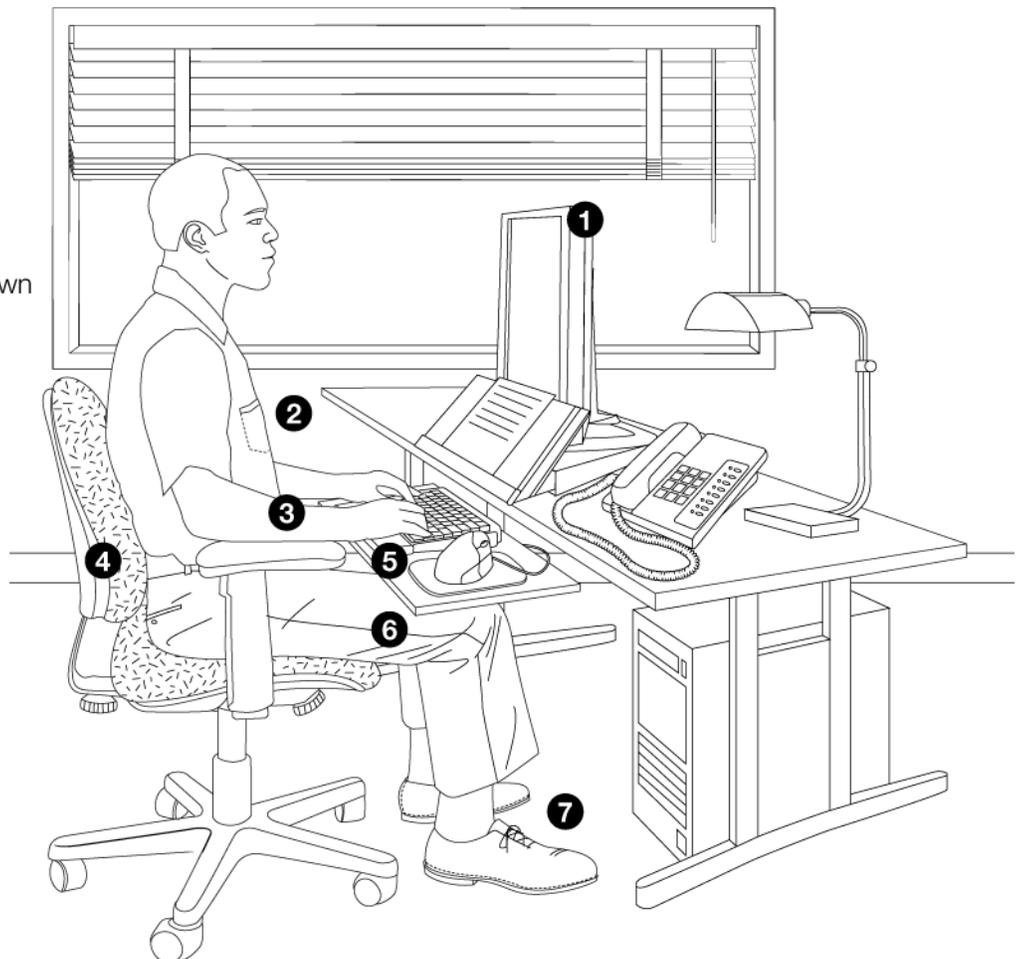
# What is Ergonomics?

Ergonomics is the field of study that seeks to fit the job to the person, rather than the person to the job. This is achieved through the evaluation and design of workplaces, environments, job tasks, equipment, and processes in relationship to human capabilities and interactions in the workplace. Anytime there is a change in the workplace (new employee, new chair, new desk), new ergonomic solutions are required. It is important that all furniture (chairs, desks) and other accessories are adjustable in order to meet individual workers' needs, for no two people are alike. Ergonomics covers the entire work area, including issues regarding the chair, workstation, and lighting.

Effective use of ergonomic practices will assist in maintaining high levels of productivity, avoiding painful and costly employee injuries, and increasing worker satisfaction. By designing the job around the person, employees will have a decreased risk of injury and an improved perception of their "employee-centered" role at work.

## Workstation Review

- 1. Monitor Screen Top**  
Slightly below eye level
- 2. Body**  
Centered in front of the monitor and keyboard
- 3. Forearms**  
Level or tilted slightly down
- 4. Lower Back**  
Supported by chair
- 5. Wrists**  
Should not rest while typing and be in line with the elbows
- 6. Legs**  
Horizontal
- 7. Feet**  
Resting flat on the floor or footrest



# Ergonomic Checklist

This checklist is designed as a quick overview to assist you in assessing your workstation. If you answer “no” to any of these questions, you should refer to the *Workplace Ergonomics Reference Guide* and make adjustments to that area of your workstation. Please use this checklist to evaluate how to use any ergonomic equipment you may have received.

		Yes	No
1.	Is the workstation adjusted so that your wrist is in a neutral position, i.e., not bent up or down?		
2.	If documents are referred to, is there an adequate document holder?		
3.	If telephone duties are performed, is a headset, phone rest, or speakerphone used?		
4.	Are your most frequently used items within easy reach?		
5.	Is the top of your monitor parallel to your eyes?		
6.	Is your monitor screen placed in such a way that light from windows and overhead lighting does not cause glare? If not, are glare screens used?		
7.	Are you able to operate the pointing device (e.g. mouse) without extended, long duration, or repetitive reaching?		
8.	Is your pointing device on the same plane as the keyboard and in a comfortable position?		
9.	Is the seat height adjustable so that the entire sole of your foot rests on the floor or footrest, and the back of the knee is slightly higher than the seat of the chair?		
10.	Does your chair have five or more legs?		
11.	Are the lighting levels in your workspace comfortable?		
12.	Is your workspace free from excessive heat, cold, vibration, and noise?		
13.	Do you take short breaks while key-stroking?		

# Ergonomic Needs Assessment

## Chair

Your chair is perhaps the single most important component of a healthy working environment. In fact, it is what most people should adjust first - before modifying their keyboard or monitor position.

If you do not have an adjustable chair, you may need to think creatively to obtain an ideal sitting posture. Lumbar support cushions and footrests are potential solutions.

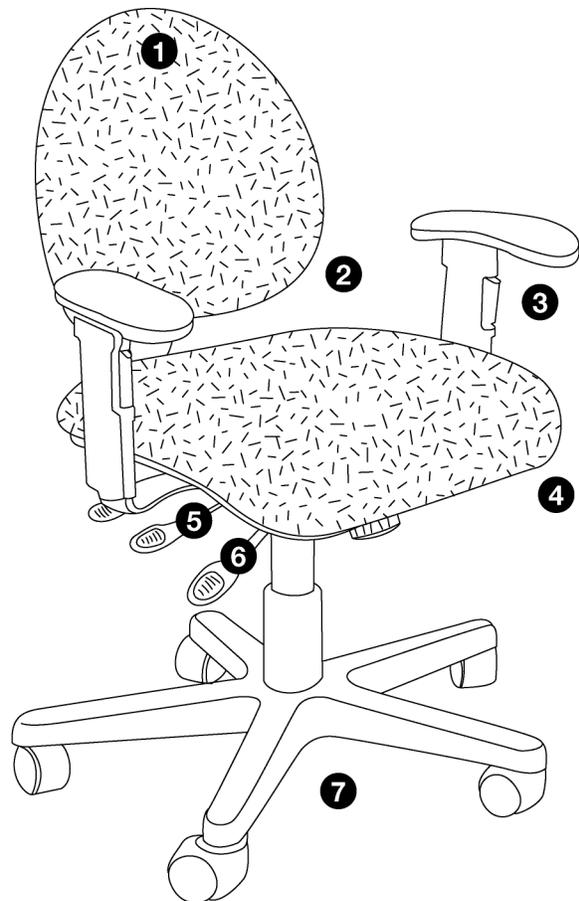
### Features of an Ergonomic Chair

The mechanisms for adjusting the chair should be easy to locate and adjust with one hand while seated. One should understand the functions of the mechanisms, and know how to operate them.



**Ergo Tip:** Fully adjustable chairs are essential to an ergonomic environment.

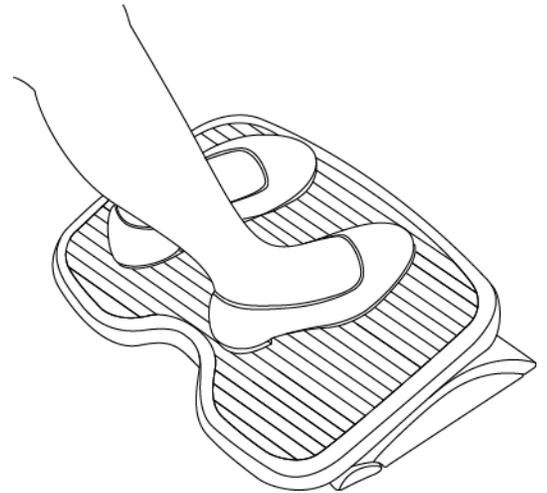
1. Breathable, medium texture upholstery
2. Adjustable lumbar support that moves up/down and forward/backward
3. Adjustable armrests that move up/down and inward/outward
4. Seat pan with a rounded front edge (waterfall design)
5. Adjustable seat pan that moves up and down and tilts forward and backward
6. A tilt mechanism that tilts backward and forward
7. Five-caster base and full 360-degree swivel



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## Proper Seating Adjustments

- First adjust the chair height for the user and then adjust the work surface to accommodate the chair.
- When working at the keyboard, adjust the seat pan height so that the elbows are the same height as the home row of the keyboard and so the wrists are neutral while typing.
- Adjust the height of the seat pan so that the highest point of the seat is just below the kneecap.
- For adequate thigh support, adjust the depth of the seat by moving the backrest forward and backward so the clearance between the front edge of the seat and the lower part of the legs fits comfortably. Ideally, the user can fit two fingers between the knee and the front of the seat.
- Adjust the armrest height so the user's elbows rest lightly on the armrests with the upper arms straight up and down and the forearms horizontal or slightly downward.
- Adjust the height of the backrest so that it supports the small of the lower back. Note: the back of chair should not “give” when the user leans back in the chair.
- Feet should rest flat on the floor. If the feet do not rest flat on the floor after properly adjusting your chair, a footrest should be used.



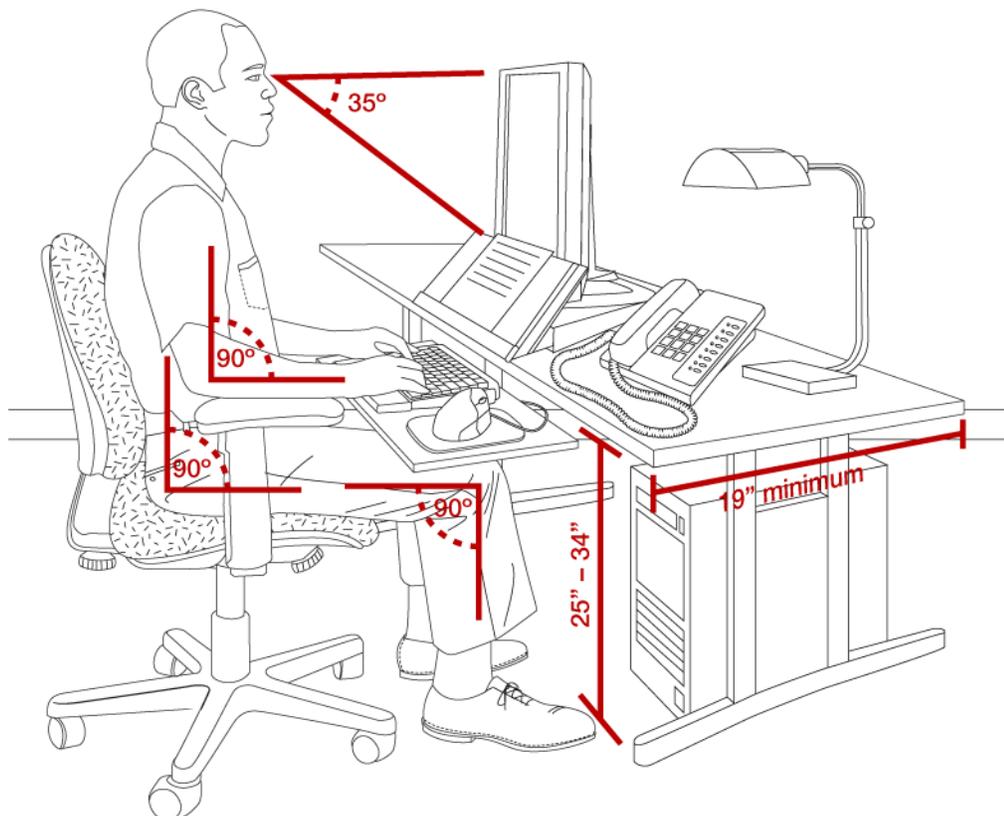
## Preventing Posture Problems

- Ensure that the chair and workstation are adjusted properly.
- Place frequently used items within an easy arm's reach and items that are used less often further away.
- Avoid long periods of working in one position and repeating the same motions.
- Vary tasks to change body position.
- Eliminate monitor glare by properly positioning the desk (perpendicular to window) and adjusting your lighting for specific tasks.

## Workstation

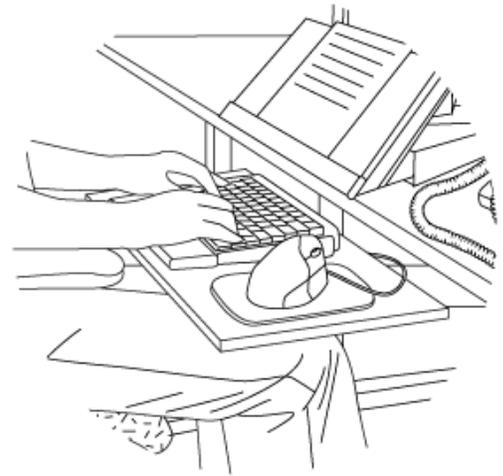
### Proper Work Surface Setup

- The work surface should be installed or adjusted to be approximately 25" - 34" high for seated work and to fit a range of operator sizes (ensure that adjustments can be made easily).
- The space beneath the work surface should have sufficient room above the legs to allow for a range of body postures. The knee well should be 30" by 19" deep.
- The work surface should have adequate space for equipment (monitor, telephone, stapler, tape dispenser, etc...) to be located close to the user to minimize bending, flexing, or twisting of arms, wrists, or hands.
- A matte finish on the work surface is ideal to reduce light reflection.
- The keyboard and mouse should be placed together on a platform that is at least 28" wide, directly in front of the user and directly beneath the monitor.
- The keyboard and mouse platform should easily move side to side, up and down, in and out, and lock securely in place.
- The height of the keyboard and mouse platform should allow the user's hands to rest lightly on keyboard or mouse with the forearms using the chair armrests for support.



## Keyboard & Mouse Adjustments

- The keyboard height should allow straight wrists and a 90-degree angle between the upper arm and the forearm (angle should adjust by 20-degrees up or down for individual preference and periodic adjustment).
- The keyboard height and angle should be adjustable (reverse slope).
- The keyboard and mouse should have a wrist rest and/or mouse rest available for support when taking mini-breaks.
- The standard keyboard should be replaced with an alternative keyboard (split-key) and alternative pointing device (trackball or touchpad) if a musculoskeletal disorder develops.
- The keyboard should be able to support “short-cut software” (macros).



Ergo Tip: “Wrist rests” are misleading. One should only use a wrist rest while taking a break from typing!

## Peripheral Items

- Ensure peripheral items that are used most frequently are placed closest to the user so that they can be conveniently and comfortably reached.
- Use an in-line document holder that sits between the keyboard and monitor and is aligned with the body midline so that all the user has to do is look down to see the documents and raise their eyes to see the monitor.
- Use a screen-mounted document holder and position this to the same side of the monitor as the user’s dominant eye.
- Use a freestanding document holder and position this next to the side of the monitor and slightly angle it so that it follows a curve from the side of the monitor.
- To reduce the stress in the neck, a headset may be beneficial to reduce stretching and improperly holding the phone.

## Storage Location

- Materials should be stored in an accessible area (between 15” - 48” above floor).
- Storage areas should allow 30” x 48” clear maneuvering space and accommodate right or left-hand access.
- Deep storage should have “lazy susan” carousels, pull-out shelves or drawers with full-extension ball bearing slides.

- Stored materials should have labels facing out with instructions, symbols, or color-coding.

## Lighting

Be aware of florescent lights as well as window lighting. Use a glare screen to reduce glare on the monitor screen. Use task lighting.

### Proper Lighting

- Overhead light may cause glare and can be reduced by the use of a panel diffuser (diffuser should direct the light straight down rather than out across the room).
- Lighting with a dimmer control should be used with supplemental task lighting.
- Task lighting is designed to boost lighting levels in a highly localized area, so that overall lighting can be reduced to cut glare.
- Reduce direct sunlight by placing blinds or curtains on all windows.
- Cover polished work surfaces with pads or blotters to reduce glare.
- Reposition the angle and/or slope of the computer screen to reduce glare.
- A non-glare screen overlay should be considered to reduce unwanted glare.

**!** Ergo Tip: Too much illumination can cause glare, either directly from the light source, or indirectly from reflective surfaces.

### Proper Monitor Placement

- The monitor should be placed perpendicular to the windows or in such a location that the windows are not directly in front of or behind the monitor.
- The monitor should be placed on a solid, stable surface directly in front of your chair and directly over the center of the workstation knee well.
- The monitor's contrast and brightness controls should be adjusted to improve the screen image.
- The monitor should be placed so that the user's eyes are at least an arm's length from the screen (approximately 18" – 28" away from eyes).
- The monitor should be supported so that the top edge of the screen is at eye level (lower if the user wears bifocals).



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## Visual Clarity

- To reduce stress to the eye muscles, follow the 20x20x20 rule. Every 20 minutes look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds.
- To keep eyes well lubricated, one should blink often.
- For ultimate clarity, a monitor with at least 1024 x 768 resolution and a dot pitch of .28 or less should be used.
- For better visual clarity, the monitor screen should be cleaned at least once a week.

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## Healthy Work Practices

- Adjust your chair, work surface, keyboard platform, keyboard and mouse to maintain a neutral position.
- Sit in a comfortable upright position with your feet flat on the floor (or on a footrest), thighs fully supported by the chair seat, with no pressure on back of the knees.
- Alternate tasks throughout the work shift (stop using keyboard, lean back and proofread your work, retrieve work from printer, file documents, make phone calls).
- Wherever possible, distribute or alternate tasks between right and left hands and alternate between use of keyboard and mouse (use keystroke equivalents to mouse).
- Change your posture frequently throughout the day.
- Use minimal force when typing on your keyboard.
- Place a document holder next to your computer monitor at approximately the same angle and height of the screen.
- Work to minimize vibration from keyboard and other office equipment.
- Monitor sound levels to ensure that communication can occur without a great deal of interference from external noise.

## Health Factors

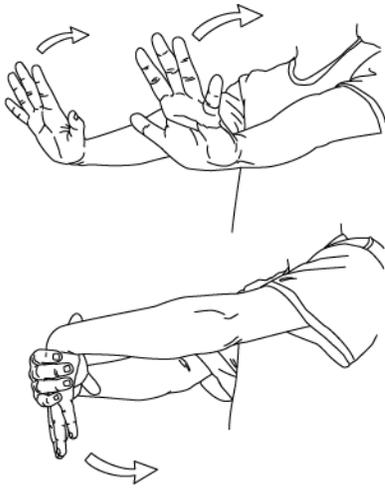
- Maintain a comfortable temperature, good air quality and adequate circulation in your workstation at all times.
- Move often throughout the day to help circulation.
- You should have regular general medical and eye examinations as recommended by a physician.
- Get adequate rest, regular exercise and maintain a healthy diet.



Ergo Tip: Your blood carries more nutrients to your muscles, tendons, and nerves, when you are physically fit.

## Workspace Exercises

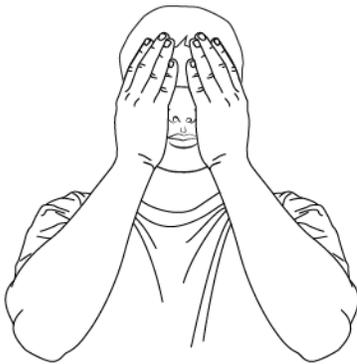
- Take regular breaks for simple, brief exercises (shoulder shrugs, neck rolls, ankle rotations, leg extensions, overhead stretches, hand shakes, finger spreads).
- Stand up every 45 minutes to give the muscles a good stretch.
- Every 20 minutes, focus on something 20 feet away for 20 seconds.



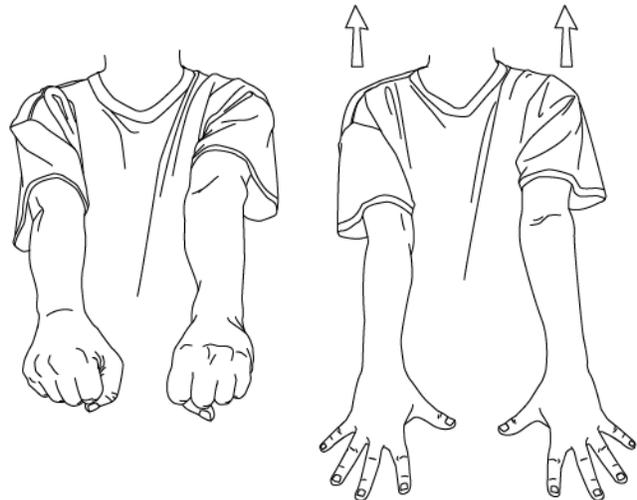
**Exercise 1:** With arms extended in front of you, gently flex both wrists, pressing the tops of your hands towards your body (hold for 5 seconds). Release wrists to a neutral position. Then, placing the palm of your right hand across the top of your left hand, gently press the palm of your hand towards your body (hold for 5 seconds). Repeat with the other hand.



**Exercise 2:** With your right arm extended to your side, place your left hand on the top of your head and gently press your left ear towards your left shoulder (hold for 5 seconds). Repeat with the other side of your body.



**Exercise 3:** Cup your hands gently over your closed eyes (hold for 1 minute).



**Exercise 4:** With arms extended in front of you, first clench both fists (hold for 5 seconds). Then spread fingers as far as you can (hold for 5 seconds). Repeat 5 times.

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## Accessible Work Environment

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a landmark law that protects the civil rights of persons with disabilities. It prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in employment, State and local government services, transportation, public accommodations, commercial facilities, and telecommunications. To ensure access to the built environment, the ADA requires the establishment of design criteria for the construction and alteration of facilities covered by the law. These requirements, which were developed by the United States Access Board, are known as the ADA and ABA Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities (ADAAG) (<http://www.access-board.gov/ada-aba/final.cfm>). The Board's guidelines serve as the baseline for standards used to enforce the ADA and the federal buildings legislation, entitled the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968. Below are some basic guidelines that you can follow to ensure that your work environment is safe and accessible.

### Accessible Doorways

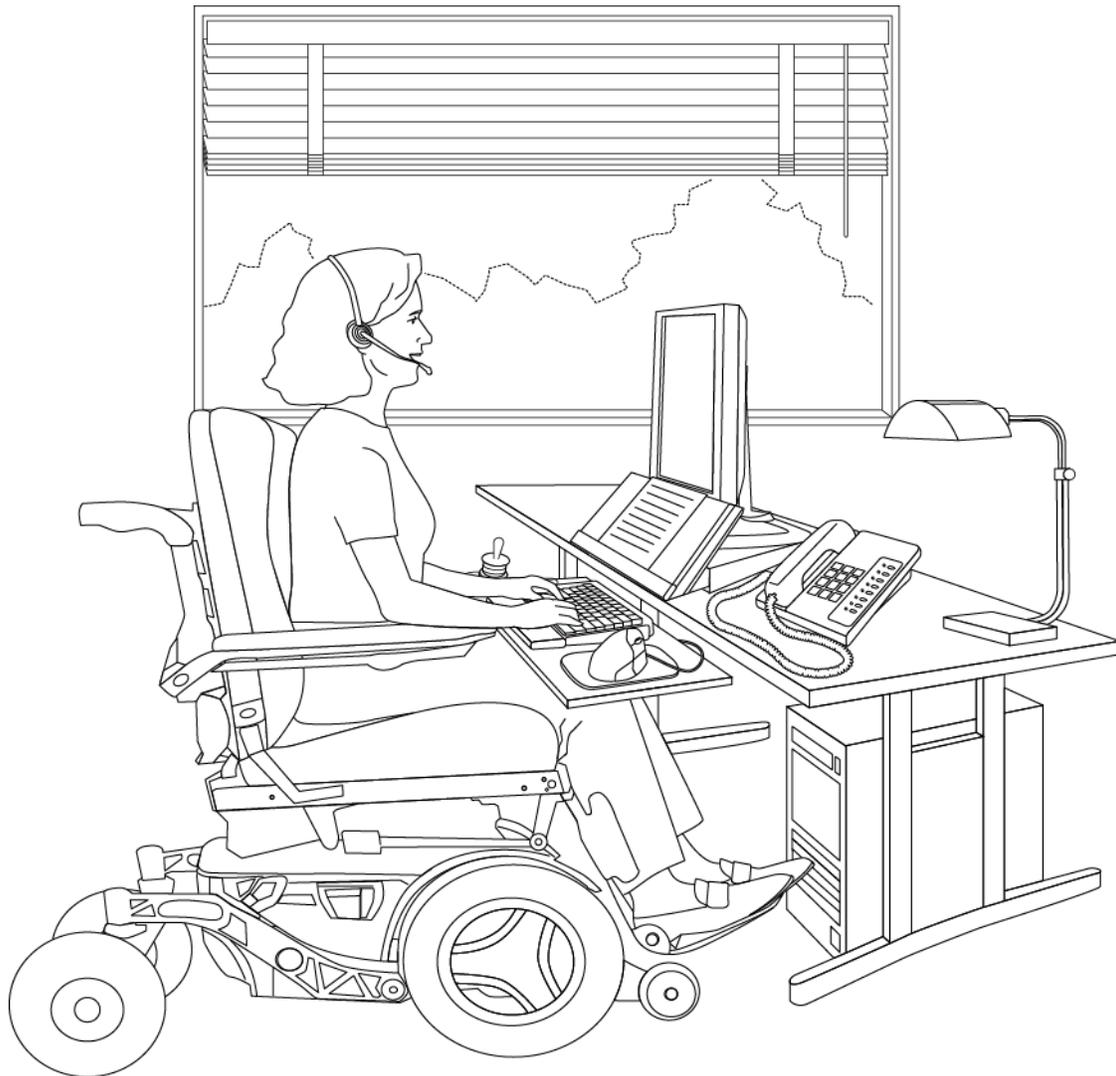
- The doorways should provide at least 32" clearance; level or add a ramp to any threshold greater than 3/4" high.
- There should be kick-plates installed 12-18" above floor.
- The inside and outside of doors should provide 60" clear floor space and 18" to the latch side; between sets of doors, allow at least 48", plus the width of the doors.
- The doorknobs should be replaced with levers, push-bars, or U-shaped pull handles 36-48" above the floor.
- The door closer resistance should be minimized or powered door openers should be installed.

### Accessible Work Areas

- The workspace should be large enough to accommodate individuals who use a wheelchair (48" aisle width between workstations).
- Distances between entrances, work areas, restrooms, office equipment, and other common facilities should be minimized.
- The work area should be at least 36" wide for a clear path of travel.
- Objects hanging lower than 80" above the floor or protruding more than 4" from the walls should be removed.
- The carpeting should be non-absorbent in warm, dark colors without padding or sculptured textures.
- The walls and floors should maintain both color and brightness contrasts.

## Ergonomics and Assistive Technology

When setting up a workstation for a person with a disability, ergonomic principals remain the same. Please refer to this *Workplace Ergonomics Reference Guide* for proper work surface setup and good placement tips. It is advisable to adhere to good ergonomic positioning while utilizing the appropriate assistive technology.



**Ergo Tip:** Using assistive technology, employees may be able to perform additional assignments or perform current tasks more efficiently.

## Available Assistive Technology

- Screen reading software operates a speech synthesizer, which voices the contents of a computer screen, allowing people who are Blind or have low-vision to access the computer environment.
- People who are Blind may use a Braille Embosser which provides hard copy Braille output from a computer.
- Individuals with low-vision may need a larger monitor or a closed-circuit television (CCTV) to magnify the print. The monitor should be placed perpendicular to the windows or in such a location that the windows are not directly in front of or behind the monitor.
- Individuals who are Deaf or hard of hearing can use a videophone or teletypewriter (TTY) to provide telephone accessibility.
- Assistive listening devices make conference rooms and auditoriums accessible for individuals who are hard of hearing.
- Persons with dexterity limitations may use voice recognition software allowing them to input data by using their voice alone or in conjunction with the mouse or keyboard.
- Alternative keyboards and pointing devices can facilitate the use of personal computers.



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## Beyond the Office: The Ergonomics of Telework

In this information age, more and more professionals with disabilities are seeking telework as their most appropriate form of reasonable accommodation. Per Public Law 106-346, Section 359, the Office of Personnel Management outlines the specifications for implementation of this guideline.

Each executive agency shall establish a policy under which eligible employees of the agency may participate in telecommuting to the maximum extent possible without diminished employee performance. The requirements of this Section are to be applied to 25 percent of the federal workforce, and to an additional 25 percent of such workforce each year thereafter (Public Law 106-346, Section 359: 10/23/2000).

The mere establishment of a telework policy does not automatically infer compliance with the law. Agencies must consistently review their telework policies to ensure that the practical enforcement of this regulation readily facilitates telework in all circumstances where it is deemed appropriate based on the essential functions of the job. If a telework policy is in place at an agency and assigned duties allow for this accommodation, employees who exhibit satisfactory performance and wish to participate must be allowed to do so.

Once telework has been arranged, it is vital to execute the same ergonomic principals discussed in this reference guide when arranging a home office environment. Please refer back to the guide for specific recommendations. To learn more about telework, please visit <http://www.telework.gov>.

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## Ergonomic Statistics: Do You Know the Numbers?

1. Workplace Musculoskeletal Disorders (WMSD) account for \_\_\_\_\_% of all lost workday injuries & illnesses.  
a) 5%                      b) 20%                      c) 33%
2. The average federal government cost (medical & Workers' Compensation costs) for a carpal tunnel syndrome case is \$\_\_\_\_\_.  
a) \$1,280                      b) \$3,476                      c) \$8,799
3. Carpal tunnel syndrome accounts for \_\_\_\_\_% of all workplace injuries.  
a) 3%                      b) 15%                      c) 31%
4. In 2014, for all workers, there were\_\_\_\_\_ cases of WMSDs.  
a) 100,250                      b) 275,675                      c) 365,580
5. An ergonomic work environment can increase productivity on average by \_\_\_\_\_%  
a) 7%                      b) 11%                      c) 34%
6. \$\_\_\_\_\_ is the average annual cost to an employer for altering a workstation.  
a) \$150                      b) \$650                      c) \$1,200
7. Ergonomic related injuries account for \$\_\_\_\_\_ in Workers' Compensation costs each year.  
a) \$20 Thousand                      b) \$20 Million                      c) \$20 Billion
8. \_\_\_\_\_ WMSD's must occur before the Occupational Safety & Health Administration's (OSHA) ergonomic standard is triggered to be implemented.  
a) 1                      b) 5                      c) 10
9. Individuals with upper extremity repetitive stress injuries (RSI) lose an average of \_\_\_\_\_ work days per injury.  
a) 2                      b) 13                      c) 21
10. Individuals with RSI symptoms reported a loss of roughly \_\_\_\_\_ hours of productivity per month.  
a) 0.75                      b) 1.66                      c) 2.2

## Answers

1. 33%   2. \$8,799   3. 15%   4. 365,580   5. 11%   6. \$150   7. \$20 Billion   8. 1   9. 13   10. 1.66

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## Ergonomic Resources

### Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program (CAP)

#### Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program

**Phone:** 703-614-8416 (Voice)

**FAX:** 703-697-5851

**Email:** [cap@mail.mil](mailto:cap@mail.mil)

**Web:** [www.cap.mil](http://www.cap.mil)

To schedule an appointment at CAPTEC:

**Phone:** 703-693-5160 (Voice)

**Email:** [cap.captec@mail.mil](mailto:cap.captec@mail.mil)

### Additional Resources

#### Army

US Army Public Health Command

ALPH Ergonomics Program

DSN: 584-4375

Voice: (410) 436-4375

Web: <http://phc.amedd.army.mil/topics/workplacehealth/ergo/pages/officerergonomics.aspx>

#### General Services Administration (GSA)

Web: [www.section508.gov](http://www.section508.gov)

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## **The Ergonomics Center of North Carolina**

Voice: (919) 515-2052

Web: [www.theergonomicscenter.com](http://www.theergonomicscenter.com)

## **Ergonomics.org**

Web: [www.ergonomics.org](http://www.ergonomics.org)

## **National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)**

Division of Surveillance, Hazard Evaluations and Field Studies

Voice: 1-800-232-4636 (Voice), 1-888-232-6348 (TTY)

Web: [www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/ergonomics](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/ergonomics)

## **Navy**

Navy & Marine Corps Public Health Center

Web: [www.navfac.navy.mil/Safety](http://www.navfac.navy.mil/Safety)

## **Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA)**

Director, Office of Ergonomic Support

Voice: 1-800-321-6742

Web: [www.osha.gov/SLTC/ergonomics](http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/ergonomics)

## **Office-Ergo**

Web: [www.office-ergo.com](http://www.office-ergo.com)



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