

Celebrate Wellness!

Ergonomics

What does “Ergonomics” mean? How can good ergonomics help you live more comfortably and age more gracefully? Here are some tips, courtesy of the Virginia Chiropractic Association (VCA).

Ergonomics is “an applied science concerned with designing and arranging things people use so that the people and things interact most efficiently and safely.”ⁱ From the way you sit, to the way you play, to the way you sleep, good ergonomics means less aches, pains, and postural strains... and possibly both increased productivity and enjoyment of life. With little to lose, and everything to gain, you’re wise to take advantage of proper ergonomic principles.

Whether you or your children spend time reading for pleasure, work, or school, be sure you avoid postures that strain the neck and back. Holding a book in your hands while lying on your stomach placed a prolonged stress on the neck and back, potentially leading to headaches and other pains. Sit in a comfortable chair when possible, and consider using a reading stand that allows you to enjoy your reading hands-free.

When driving, be sure your seat isn’t reclined too far or it can act as a “ramp” in a motor vehicle accident, making a minor fender-bender into a major whiplash event. Adjust your headrest so it’s close (1” - 1.5”) behind your head; if it’s too low, it can become a fulcrum for severe whiplash in a rear-end collision.

When lifting, use your powerful thigh, gluteal, and core muscles to handle the load. A slight forward lean turns the muscles of the low back on, though leaning too far forward actually causes the low back muscles to relax, which puts your spine at increased injury risk.ⁱⁱ Your chiropractor can teach you how to move and lift more safely.

One of your main enemies may be your chair. Sitting -- especially in front of your computer or driving long distances -- is a tremendous stress on your spinal discs. Discs require motion for proper nutrition, so consider taking frequent breaks. Be sure your feet are comfortably placed, and adjust your seat if possible so that your neck isn’t tipped too far forward or back for long periods of time. Also, be sure your computer monitor is located directly in front of you. Here’s a simple way to locate a good position for your monitor: Sit comfortably in your chair, and close your eyes. Adjust your body until you feel comfortable. Open your eyes, and you should be looking at your monitor. If you have to look up, down, or to the side, then your monitor isn’t where it should be. Relocate it.

We spend roughly 25-35% of our lives sleeping, so it’s no surprise that sleeping postures affect our health. The base is a comfortable, supportive mattress. Avoid stomach sleeping, as leaving the head turned to breathe stresses the neck and upper back. If you have difficulty sleeping on your back or side, consider a pillow under the knees (on your back) or between your knees (on your side). In addition, consider using an ergonomically correct pillow that supports the natural curve of the neck when you’re on your back, as well as taking stress off the shoulders and preserving proper spinal alignment when you’re on your side.



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ⁱ Merriam-Webster dictionary, www.merriam-webster.com

ⁱⁱ *The biomechanical and clinical significance of the lumbar erector spinae flexion-relaxation phenomenon: a review of literature.* Colloca CJ, Hinrichs RN *J. Manipulative Physiol Ther.* 2005 Oct;28(8):623-31.