

Ergonomics FAQ

1. I suspect I may have an ergonomic-related problem that may be workplace-related. What should I do?

In general, the first step for any health and safety concern is to talk to your supervisor. They should review your job activities, the manner in which you conduct the work, and the way your workstation is set up. Always report all work-related incidents using this [reporting form](#). Support will also be available by contacting people.culture@algonau.ca.

2. Are all “ergonomic” products helpful?

The term “ergonomic” is often used as a descriptor for many office items such as chairs, wrist supports, keyboard trays, etc. Unfortunately, this can be misleading.

Ergonomics is all about recognizing that people come in all shapes and sizes with different physical needs and different job activities. Having said this, you are simply not going to find a chair, for example, that is “ergonomic” for everyone in the workplace. Someone who is 6’5” and someone who is 5’1” would typically not find the same office chair to be comfortable and “ergonomic” for their individual needs and preferences.

Always think about the person using the product and how the product will be used. The way you use the equipment at your workstation also plays an important role (e.g., maintaining neutral wrists when typing, sitting back in your chair for back support).

Before purchasing, try out the chair in a real work situation for an appropriate period of time. Arrange a trial with the vendor and ask about a warranty.

3. Should my chair have armrests?

The choice of armrests on a chair is related to a couple of factors: user preference and the workstation design. Some people like or need armrests to provide some support, especially if they have shoulder or neck problems. Many chair manufacturers generally offer a number of different types of armrests on chairs – adjustable height, width, tilt, padding, size, etc.

The user should evaluate the different options when selecting a chair. Ensure that the armrests do not interfere with access to the workstation or prevent an individual from sitting as close to the workstation as required.

4. What is the best height for my monitor?

The majority of people find that the most comfortable viewing height for the monitor is to have the top of the screen about eye level or slightly lower. If an individual wears specialized eyewear, such as bifocals/trifocals, the monitor should be placed such that the person can look directly at the screen (this is generally at a lower height than for non-bifocal/trifocal wearers). Remember you can also adjust the tilt of your monitor(s) throughout the day to change up your position.

5. What if I use multiple monitors?

If you use multiple monitors, align them horizontally, place them close to each other and adjust brightness/contrast such that there is not a large variation. Laptops should be propped up (i.e., stack of paper or a laptop riser) and the screen aligned horizontally with the monitor(s). Based on how often you use each monitor, placement may differ. For example:

Two monitors used equally (50:50): consider placing them both in front of you with the edge where they meet aligned to the centre of your body.

Two monitors with one being the main screen (70:30): consider placing the main/largest screen directly in front and aligned to the centre of your body. The second or subsequent monitors should be placed on either side of the main monitor at a 45° angle.

6. What is the best height for my keyboard and mouse device?

The “best” height will vary depending on the individual. Generally, your elbows should be at approximately 90-100 degrees when typing or mousing. Shoulders should be dropped and relaxed while typing/mousing – not shrugged upwards. Refer to our **office ergonomics infographic** for more information.

When you are seated in your chair, your feet should be flat on the floor (or footrest), your back should be in contact with the backrest, **and** your shoulders relaxed. When working at your keyboard, your arms should be in a non-reaching position (i.e., elbows close to the waist), the forearms roughly horizontal, and the wrists straight. The mouse device should be situated very close to the keyboard, at the same level, side by side. When using the mouse, the arm should be maintained in a non-reaching position (i.e., elbow in close to the body) and avoid “planting” the wrist on the surface when manipulating the mouse. Instead, try to use the larger muscles of the upper arm to do this work.

7. How do I know if my chair is adjusted properly?

Your chair should be comfortable! There needs to be good contact between the lower back and the backrest of the chair. The height of the chair should be set such that the user can rest their feet comfortably on the floor. If this is not possible, a footrest is required. Check that there is a bit of a space between the back of the knee and the front edge of the seat pan — you do not want to

inadvertently restrict circulation to the lower legs. Also, there should be no sensation of pressure on the back of the thighs.

8. What can I do to reduce the risk of developing a repetitive strain injury?

There are four major factors that are known to increase the risk of an RSI — repetition, awkward posture, excessive force, and lack of rest or recovery time. By adopting “neutral” work postures as much as possible and by taking regular stretch breaks (e.g., this could be simply getting up to refill your water by moving different muscle groups), you can go a long way to reduce your risk.

Other important factors that can minimize your risk are avoiding static postures, maintaining good health and nutrition, and by maintaining fitness and flexibility.

9. Are blue light blocking lenses or screens required?

There is inconclusive evidence that blue light blocking screens or glasses are effective and therefore not required or recommended items for computer workstations. Users are advised to ensure proper setup of their monitor (e.g., adjust distance, brightness, contrast), keep handheld devices approximately an arms’ length distance away, and take appropriate vision breaks. See troubleshooting tips for sources of Eye Strain/Headaches. There are also device settings and apps that reduce blue light from screens without special lens coatings or screens to block blue light.

11. What is the most ergonomic way to use a laptop?

The challenge with laptops is that their monitors are fixed in height. Laptops should be propped up higher, for example with the help of a riser, such that the top of the screen is about eye level or slightly lower. An external compatible mouse and keyboard should be used in lieu of the built-in keyboard/mouse. Considerations can also be made to plug in an external monitor.

12. What if I work in temporary, mobile or remote work locations?

For approval to work remotely, please reach out to your supervisor and the People & Culture department to discuss and get the necessary approval.

13. What if I share a workstation?

If you share a workstation with another individual, it is important to take the time at the beginning of your shift to make necessary adjustments to fit your needs. If you need a reminder on how to set up your workstation, please see the Infographic.

Do you have additional questions about office ergonomics?

If you have additional questions that were not answered here, Algoma University employees are invited to send in their questions to healthandsafety@algonau.ca or people.culture@algonau.ca.

The Health and Safety team does not provide recommendations for or purchases of sit-stand workstations or other specialized ergonomic equipment.

[How to set up your workstation](#)