

# For good office ergonomics, avoid these 5 risks

Musculoskeletal disorders such as [carpal tunnel syndrome](#), tendinitis, muscle strains and lower back injuries affect the muscles, nerves, blood vessels, ligaments and tendons, according to OSHA. But [practicing good ergonomics](#) can help prevent workers from acquiring MSDs.

Ergonomics is the practice of fitting the job to the worker. This includes avoiding tasks that may lead to injuries. “Ergonomists have examined a number of jobs where there have been a high incidence of [musculoskeletal disorders], and have found some common elements present in each of these jobs, which are associated with these injuries,” the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries states. “These elements are called risk factors, because exposure to them increases the chance that a worker will become injured.”

Here are five ergonomic risk factors to be mindful of in the office, according to Washington L&I:

1. **Repetition.** Do you perform the same motions repeatedly throughout the day, such as typing on a keyboard, flipping through paperwork, clicking a mouse or using a calculator? Doing so can result in trauma to your joints and surrounding tissue.
2. **Static loading or sustained exertions.** These terms may not be familiar to you, but Washington L&I states that these risk factors have “increased in the computerized office.” Static loading is when the muscles hold the body in a single position for a long stretch of time, which can result in circulation problems and cause muscle tension. Sustained exertions are a form of static loading that occurs when force is continuously applied for long periods of time. Examples include keeping your head still while looking at your monitor, sitting without making any movements for long periods of time and holding down the shift key on your keyboard.
3. **Awkward positions and postures.** “Postures that bend the joints into positions where they are more likely to become injured are termed

awkward,” Washington L&I notes. An office worker can experience awkward postures by slouching or leaning forward in his or her chair, cradling a phone between the ear and shoulder, reaching up and over to access the keyboard or mouse, and bending at the waist to load a copy machine.

4. **Mechanical contact stress.** This risk factor occurs when a hard or sharp surface or object presses into a person’s soft tissues, such as the tendons, nerves and blood vessels, which can lead to serious injuries over time. Examples of mechanical contact stress are when a wrist rests on the edge of a desk while typing, when elbows lean against a hard armrest or when sitting in a chair that places pressure on the back of a worker’s thighs.
5. **Force.** Washington L&I notes that a number of office tasks require a moderate amount of force to be applied to small muscles, which may result in muscle and ligament strains, swelling and fatigue. Tasks that may exert too much force on a worker include grasping heavy folders, gripping a mouse too tightly and “pounding” on a keyboard to type.