

## Optimise's DIY Computer Workstation Setup

**Set yourself up correctly at a computer workstation by working from the 'floor up'. Start by moving back from your desk so that you think about your body and comfort** - rather than back into your old habits at the desk. Remember that while you might have one main comfortable posture, that it is healthy to have a range of work postures that you move between. We don't make good statues. This is why desks that offer the option of standing for some of the day are good – and so is building in exercise in other ways. Walk to the printer, stand for your tea break at a tea/coffee 'bar', stand or walk for meetings and to answer the phone, and consider a shared standing work area so that everyone can benefit.

1. **With your feet flat on the floor** and in your normal footwear, **adjust the seat height** so that your thighs rest evenly along the seat base. The thighs should be either horizontal or slightly angled with your knees lower than your hips - use the seat tilt adjustment to alter the seat angle if your chair has this.
2. **Adjust the seat back height** so that the lumbar support fits snugly into your lower back. The lumbar curve is at about waist height, and this is where the lumbar support should fit.
3. **Adjust the angle of the seat back** so that you lean slightly back. Not fully reclined, but so you can relax back into the support without falling forwards or needing to push back to stay upright. Whilst resting on the chair back you should be able to easily view the screen and reach to the keyboard.
4. Some chairs may have an additional **sliding seat pan adjustment** that benefits tall people who may find the seat to be 'too short'. With your bottom right to the back of the seat, the seat pan should come to about two to three fingers width from the back of your knee.
5. Once the chair position is comfortable... close your eyes, and imagine that you are putting your hands onto a keyboard while you are very relaxed. **Check that your elbows are hanging under your shoulders, and that your arms and hands are relaxed.** Take a slow deep breath, and as you let it out, drop onto the imaginary keyboard. Open your eyes, and without moving your hands, look at where they are positioned. (It may be that your hands are resting on your thighs, and this is fine). This is the ideal height for your keyboard. **Adjust your desk height so that the top of the keyboard sits at this height.** Desks that are too tall for the user introduce a health risk and workplace hazard.
6. **Footstools** may minimise (but not eliminate) the hazard introduced with a too-tall desk, but **should generally only be used as an interim measure** until a suitable height desk can be provided. Many desks can be shortened, or purchase desks that are adjustable in height - to suit you and your work.
7. **Keyboards should be placed flat**, not angled up at the back (as this overworks the arm and hand muscles). With your upper arms hanging loosely by your sides, your hands should easily reach the keyboard - usually 10 or 15 cm from the front of the desk. The **alphabetic keys should be central** - with the 'g' and 'h' keys aligned with your nose (or remember 'b' for bellybutton). If you use a wrist and/or mouse rest, remember that the purpose is to provide a rest between periods of keying. Don't anchor wrists on it when keying as this may strain small forearm muscles. **Let your hands rest slightly 'thumbs up'** on the wrist/mouse rest.
8. Your **screen should be directly in front of you, at about arms length.** The top of the screen should be about horizontal with your eyes, and you should look slightly down into the centre of the screen. If using dual screens they should be at the same height, with the main screen directly in front of you and the other close and to one side. If two screens are used equally they should be close together, left and right of the centre.
9. If you write with your right hand, it is well worth using the **mouse in your left hand.** Right handed mousing demands an awkward stretch beyond the numeric numbers on the keyboard, while left mouse use allows a more central hand position immediately beside the alphabetic keys. Go through the Control Panel to alter the mouse control to the left, making three adjustments: a) change the main click button to be operated with the left index finger; b) slow down the double click speed, and c) slow the mouse speed so that it can be operated with a larger action. These changes allow our somewhat clumsy left hand to gain the necessary 'mouse skills', and often you can speed things up again after a week or two. If you are left handed, be sure that you balance the work that you do with your hands to reduce the risk of overworking one side.

Use reference material such as HabitAtWork - [www.habitatwork.co.nz](http://www.habitatwork.co.nz) (try it via Internet Explorer – it uses Adobe Flash Player) to **ensure that you are working with the use of healthy break practices, and good stretching, general exercise and dietary habits, etc.** Dealing with issues that are overloading, stressful or otherwise challenging may be necessary to help you stay healthy and comfortable while working. Many factors other than physical workstation setup can contribute to computer-related discomfort.

Refer to '*Guidelines for Using Computers: Preventing and managing Discomfort, pain and injury*' (2010) or contact Optimise for further assistance.