

## 03-01 Office Chairs

### 1 Purpose

This guide is a companion to the Ergonomics Instruction and will provide additional information relating to Office chairs.

### 2 Office Chairs

#### 2.1 Selecting an office chair

It is essential that office seating is comfortable, appropriate to the task being undertaken and easy for the operator to adjust. The often held view of the activity of sitting is that people maintain a fixed posture for long periods of time; however, when performing a range of activities, people tend to adopt different positions and postures while seated. This is desirable as it provides variation in loading of the thighs and back and in general can improve seating comfort.

##### 2.1.1 Selection criteria for adjustable office chairs

A chair is the main item of a workstation that provides adjustability for comfort and enables the work heights to be controlled. Key factors to consider when determining if the chair is appropriate for the person and the job are listed as follows:

- it should be adjustable to the task and be easily adjusted from the seated position;
- the seat should be height-adjustable, preferably utilising a gas lift for ease of adjustment;
- the seat should have a curved front edge, to minimise pressure on the underside of the thighs (see illustration);
- the seat should be able to tilt slightly backwards or forwards;
- it should have a supportive backrest that is adjustable in height, angle and depth;
- both the seat and backrest should be covered by cloth or some other type of material that breathes;
- it should have a five-star base for stability; and
- armrests are optional; they help decrease the forces on the shoulders and back during rest from keying. If provided, armrests should preferably be adjustable in height.

In general, chairs are designed to fit 90% of the adult population. Persons outside of this range, because they are tall, short or large, may need seating that is tailored to their needs.

Chairs should support the body in a way which minimises awkward postures and provides comfort, however, chair positions may need to be changed often. No chair can provide a perfect position for long periods and it is important to change postures and get up from a chair many times during the day's work. Setting up an adjustable chair for optimum support is shown in Setting up your office chair.

## 2.2 Setting up your office chair

The following information should be used as a guide only. The exact instructions will vary by manufacturer of your specific office chair.

### 2.2.1 Backrest height

- The lumbar support of the backrest (outward curve of chair cushioning) should sit in the lumbar area of your back. The backrest should be adjusted so that its convex curve fits into the curve of the lower back, centred about waist level.
- Lock the backrest into place.

### 2.2.2 Backrest angle

- Using your body weight, lean back against the backrest. Depress the control level to enable the backrest to change angle.
- Once you have set the backrest in a suitable position, lock the backrest into place. Most office chair users prefer setting their office chair backrest to approximately 90°.

### 2.2.3 Seat tilt

- Depress the control lever to adjust the tilt of your seat. On a three lever chair, this lever is often on the left hand side of the chair seat. On a two lever office chair, this lever also adjusts the angle of the chair seat.
- Shift your body weight backwards and forwards until you have positioned your seat in a comfortable position. Once you have set the seat in a suitable position, lock the seat tilt into place. Most office chair users prefer setting their office chair seat so that it is flattened out rather than tilted too far backwards or forwards.

### 2.2.4 Seat height (non-adjustable desk)

- Raise / lower the chair to enable the desk height to be at your elbow height.
- Use a footrest if you are unable to place your feet firmly on the ground when seated in this position, or if you feel pressure under your thighs from the front edge of the seat.

### 2.2.5 Seat height (adjustable desk)

- Lower the chair to rest your feet on the floor and to relieve any pressure on the underside of your thighs from the front edge of the chair.
- Lower the desk height to your elbow height when you are seating on the chair.
- If your keyboard shelf adjusts separately from the desk be careful not to create a height difference between your keyboard and mouse. This may create a 'mouse shoulder' problem by having to frequently elevate your arm to use the mouse.

## 2.3 Alternative seating options

There are a number of different types of alternative office seating available including kneeling, sit-stand and saddle chairs.

These types of seating are not necessarily better or worse than conventional ergonomic office seating, however they may not provide optimum support in a workplace where many hours are spent in sitting.

There are no current guidelines or design standards available for alternative chairs; however WorkSafe Victoria recommends that these chairs are not used for constant sitting, and that conventional chairs are also required in the office environment. Should an individual at the RMIT

wish to use an alternative office chair, they should first seek the advice of their treating practitioner and provide the advice documented for review.

### 2.3.1 Fitness balls

The fitness ball is not recommended for use as office seating due to:

- Loss of upright posture because there is not full seat and back support.
- Upright posture not being maintained during tasks that require reaching or moving around. Users are also unable to swivel or navigate around the workstation.
- The sitting surface of the fitness ball does not provide adequate support for the buttocks and thighs.
- Getting on and off or reaching from the ball may be a falling hazard.

The use of a fitness ball may be recommended by a health professional for a specific person following an injury. In this case the use of the ball should be prescribed in a documented and supervised treatment program.

## 3 References and Associated Documents

#	Title	Document Type
1	03-01 ERGONOMICS	Procedure
2		
3		
4		
5		

## 4 Document Control History

Version	Date	Description of Changes	Author	Approver
1	03/06/2015	New Document	C.Roche	A.C
2				
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