Purchasing Ergonomic Office Furniture Fact Sheet



DO YOU HAVE TO SPEND A LOT OF MONEY?

Buying items always involves spending and many people generally believe that you have to spend a lot of money when buying ergonomic office furniture. This belief is not necessarily true. With a little effort and preparation, you can make a wise investment that will pay back health dividends in the future. However, you cannot approach this project casually. The reason? Ergonomics is not a product but a process: a process of matching furniture (including tools, workstation, equipment, and environment) to the workers (and their work tasks) to reduce the hazards for injury and discomfort without undermining productivity.

What should you know about the workers who will be using furniture?

Knowing the prospective users is critical. Individual characteristics can make a significant difference. Always consider the following points:

- Body size.
- Height.
- Gender.
- Right- or left-handedness.

What should you know about the job where the furniture will be placed?

Different office tasks require different equipment, different accessories and different layouts. Understanding the basics of the work carried out helps one to understand more clearly what the workers need in order to make their job better “ergonomically”. Consider the nature of the tasks to be done:

- A lot of typing or very little.
- Typing combined with other desk work (e.g., taking notes, using a phone, filing, etc.).
- Using a mouse or other input devices (e.g., graphics tablet, a stylus, voice input).

Which factors of the work environment are important?

Many aspects of the work environment must be considered. You should take into account:

- Available space and office dimensions.
- Layout or arrangement of existing furniture.
- Light sources, specifically task lamps.

- Type and size of computers to be used.
- Laptop, or table-mounted or floor-mounted computer processors.
- Accessories such as standalone hard drives, CD-ROM drives, DVD drives, USB or other storage devices, copy-holders, mice, graphics tablets, CAD/CAM input devices, etc.
- Interaction with co-workers.

What should you focus on when selecting office furniture?

Having made the initial assessment, you may start looking for a suitable purchase. We suggest that you focus your attention on:

- Furniture with an adjustability range that can fit all prospective users. Some chairs have interchangeable cylinders to accommodate very tall or short people.
- A fully adjustable chair with height-adjustable armrests.
- An adjustable desk is preferable.
- A footrest is highly recommended if you decide on a non-adjustable desk.
- Accessories, such as a copyholder, mouse, task lamps, etc. (discuss these with staff and get their feedback as personal preferences are very important).
- Need to reach the computer processor (e.g., use of USB sticks, DVDs, CD-ROMs, etc.).

What should you know about maintaining chairs?

When buying chairs, consider any maintenance and repair costs. Some chair manufacturers will recommend an inspection and maintenance schedule. Normal wear problems may include:

- Bolts and screws loosening and falling out.
- Hydraulic cylinders can fail to hold or seize.
- Hair and lint in the casters (chair may not roll properly).

What is your next step after selecting suitable products?

Do not assume that your job is done once you have found suitable products. Before you make a final decision, you should give your staff an opportunity to test them. Remember that people accept change with differing degrees of ease. Therefore, having the staff actively involved in the decision-making process is very important for the selection of furniture and equipment that is suited to them and their work tasks. Interactive training on how to use, adjust, and readjust new equipment is also crucial for the successful introduction of new equipment and furniture into the workplace.

Keep in mind that the supplier’s claim that their products are “ergonomically” correct is no guarantee of comfort. Knowing your needs and doing your research from reliable sources will help you make the right investment that will benefit an employer and employees equally. Consulting a specialist, specifically when you have little, or no understanding of ergonomics can be a valuable investment in the entire purchasing process.

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