



## **MEMO – OFFICE CHAIR SELECTION GUIDANCE**

Wednesday, January 22, 2020

To: Department Heads

Musculoskeletal disorders are injuries that involve the body's muscles, joints, tendons, ligaments, or nerves, and what you do on and off work can contribute to them. Prevention is important because these injuries can take months or years to develop and a long time to heal. Please share this memo with your office personnel. This document, related images, and other information on work place ergonomics are available at <https://www.inyocounty.us/risk/ergo>.

### **RISK FACTORS**

In the office setting, the most common risk factors that can increase the risk of developing musculoskeletal disorders are excessive repetitive motions, awkward postures, static postures, excessive forces, and contact pressure.

- Excessive Repetition: Performing repeated motions in the same way with the same body part.
- Awkward Postures: Placing a joint towards its extreme end of movement in any direction away from its neutral, centered position.
- Static Posture: Holding an object or a body position in a still and fixed manner.
- Excessive Force: Performing an activity with excessive muscular exertion/force.
- Contact or Continuous Pressure: Direct pressure on soft tissues from resting or action against a hard surface.

### **PREVENTION**

Discomfort can become an injury if not addressed early. The key to preventing musculoskeletal disorders is educating yourself about the factors that can contribute to discomfort and injuries and then applying some basic ergonomic principles to make changes that will improve your positioning and the organization of your work area. YOU need to take an active role in preventing an injury. Report any discomfort or injury to your supervisor, and call the injury hotline at 877.215.7285 immediately if you think you have a work related injury so we can make sure to get you the care you need. You can also ask your supervisor to request an individualized workstation evaluation from Risk Management.

### **CHAIR SELECTION**

A good, supportive office chair prevents fatigue and discomfort that can come from sitting in the same chair for hours on end. Studies have shown that comfortable employees are more productive and contribute more to a positive work environment. The right chair also reduces the number of breaks required due to discomfort.



### **MEMO – OFFICE CHAIR SELECTION GUIDANCE**

Employees who sit at a desk for work for more than four hours a day can reduce their risk of work related musculoskeletal disorders by using a chair fit to them. A chair becomes ergonomic only when it specifically suits a worker's body, the particular workstation, and the tasks performed there. Chairs are custom furniture designed to fit each worker's height, width, and torso-to-leg ratio. One chair will not work for every user, and no chair is perfect for every work activity, so please be careful with hand-me-downs.

At a minimum, office chairs should have the following:

- A. Adjustable seat height relative to the floor so that knees are at about 90 degrees and at or slightly below hips, thighs are parallel with the floor, feet are flat and comfortably on the floor or a footrest, and forearms while typing are parallel with the floor.
- B. Firm lumbar support. We may be phasing out mesh back chairs as they tend to have less lumbar support and don't last as long as fabric options.
- C. Adjustable seat back height to set the lumbar support to the small of the back and the top of the back of the chair at or above the shoulder blades.
- D. Seat pan depth adjustment (either the chair back adjusts horizontally relative to the seat, or the seat itself slides forwards or backwards) so user comfortably sits all the way to the back of the chair with the width of two to three fingers between the front of the seat and the back of the knees.
- E. Swivel base. Chairs should swivel freely to allow for easy access to various parts of the desk in order to avoid over reaching.
- F. Seat tilt is optional. If the chair comes with tilt, it must also come with a tilt lock.
- G. If the chair is on wheels, it must have five (not four) casters, and wheels designed for the surface (carpet, vinyl, etc.) to support stability.
- H. If the chair has armrests, it must have adjustment for armrest height and width. Armrests must not interfere with operations and not cause user to hunch shoulders.
- I. Please pay attention to sizing.
  - a. Chairs for petite persons (5'2" or less) should have seat width of 16"-18", short cylinders (between chair and legs) at 15"-20", and a back height classified as low to mid.
  - b. Chairs for average sized persons (5'2" to 5'10") should have seat width of 18"-22", average cylinders (between chair and legs) at 16"-21", and a back height classified as mid to high.
  - c. Chairs for tall/large persons (greater than 5'10" or larger than average) should have seat width of 22"-21", average cylinders (between chair and legs) at 17"-22" that support weights greater than 275 pounds, a high back.

A properly sized and comfortable chair keeps strain and injury from occurring and is therefore important to encouraging our employees to be happy, healthy, and productive. Thank you for your attention. Please contact Risk Management if you have any questions.