

Guidelines for Managing Office Ergonomics in the Workplace

Public Service Commission
Centres of Excellence
Integrated Health, Safety and Wellness

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Saskatchewan 

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1. Purpose

The Government of Saskatchewan is committed to ensuring workplace health, safety and wellness. Ergonomic hazards can lead to chronic injury in the workplace; addressing them requires a comprehensive approach.

This document has been developed by the Safety Champion Operational Committee and endorsed by the Safety Champion Council, to provide guidance to Executive Government workplaces on how to effectively manage office ergonomics through a system of hazard recognition, education and control.

2. Introduction

Ergonomics is a science dedicated to fitting the job or task to the worker. The goal of ergonomics is to optimize the interaction between people and their work environment. These guidelines will outline education and controls to assist in preventing and resolving ergonomic related injuries.

3. Definitions

3.1 Ergonomics

Fitting the job, or task, to the worker to optimize their interaction with their work environment.

3.2 Musculoskeletal Injury (MSI)

Injuries and disorders of the muscles, tendons, ligaments, nerves, intervertebral discs, soft tissues like blood vessels, and include inflammation, sprains, strains and nerve compression disorders.

3.3 Competent Person

A person who possesses knowledge, experience and training to perform a specific duty.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

Everyone has a responsibility to build and maintain a healthy and safe workplace. Hazard recognition, evaluation and control play a prominent role in managing ergonomic hazards in the workplace. The goal is to prevent MSIs from developing through education, work design, workplace controls and continuing assessment.

4.1 Employer (Deputy Minister)

Employer should ensure employees are informed about the risks of MSIs and how to identify and correct factors that could lead to such injuries, according to the *Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Regulations, 2020 (Section 6-18), MSI Injuries and Disorders*.

Note: Additional OHS regulations pertaining to ergonomics and the employer's responsibilities include Sections 3-1 (general duties), 3-2 (duties of workers), 3-8 (training of workers), 6-2 (ventilation and air supply), 6-6 (lighting), 6-7 (thermal conditions), 6-16 (standing), 6-17 (sitting), 6-19 (shift work...), 6-20 (visually demanding tasks), and 8-1 (general duty – Noise).

4.2 Manager (Assistant Deputy Minister/Executive Director/Director/Manager/Frontline Supervisor)

The roles and responsibilities include:

- informing employees of ergonomic hazards, receive ergonomic awareness, and assess personal ergonomic hazards on a regular, or on an as needed basis;
- ensuring employees complete the [LEARN Course - Office Ergonomics #00043](#) and Ergonomic Self-Assessment Checklist and report to their supervisor/manager when:
 - an employee is assigned to a new workstation;
 - an employee's existing workstation or tasks are modified;
 - an employee reports signs or symptoms of an MSI; and,
 - an employee requests a workstation assessment.

Note: The Ergonomic Self-Assessment Checklist should be completed annually.

- reviewing the employee's completed Ergonomic Self-Assessment Checklist and determine if further steps are needed to address outstanding concerns;
- if an employee reports signs or symptoms of an MSI:
 - complete [OHS Incident Form 101](#) with the employee to determine the potential causes and solutions for addressing the issue; and
 - review ministry direction and enter the employee into the Be At Work application.
- if further steps are needed to address outstanding concerns:
 - seek consultation if required (e.g., local Occupational Health Committee, ministry's safety professional, Human Resources Business Partner, etc.); and,
- if prevention or corrective measures do not resolve the issue, arrange to have an ergonomic assessment completed by a competent person (e.g., ministry trained resource, occupational or physiotherapist, etc.). If any assistance is required, the supervisor/manager can contact the Human Resources Business Partner.

4.3 All Employees (As listed above, plus workers)

The roles and responsibilities include:

- participating in education to improve awareness and understanding of ergonomic hazards and signs/symptoms of MSIs as required. A key resource is [Learn Course - Office Ergonomics #00043](#);
- completing an Ergonomic Self-Assessment Checklist annually (recommended) as physical abilities, work tasks and equipment adjustments can change overtime;
- reporting ergonomic concerns to your immediate supervisor/manager and work with your supervisor/manager to complete an [OHS Incident Form 101](#);
- cooperating with supervisor/manager to address ergonomic issues; and,
- monitoring and proactively managing daily ergonomic workplace factors.

4.4 Occupational Health Committee/Representative

The roles and responsibilities include:

- including ergonomics as part of regular workplace inspections;
- providing ergonomic recommendations where appropriate;
- reviewing reported OHS incidents and corrective action plans to ensure ergonomic concerns are addressed in a timely manner; and,
- promoting workplace ergonomic awareness and hazard recognition (e.g., posters, lunch and learn, workplace event that promotes the topic, etc.).

5. Ergonomic Hazards Controls

5.1 Common MSI Risk Factors

Ordinary movements such as bending, gripping, holding, twisting and reaching can contribute to MSIs. Such movements are not usually harmful unless they involve:

- forceful exertions;
- many repetitive movements;
- repeated awkward motions or postures;
- sustained postures;
- excessive vibration; and,
- prolonged pressure on body tissues such as hands, wrists, arms, legs, etc.

One factor alone may cause an MSI although more than one is often involved.

5.2 Control Measures Implementation

Once ergonomic hazards and risks have been identified, control measures need to be implemented to reduce the risk of an MSI. MSIs occur when the physical capabilities of the worker are exceeded.

Making changes to the equipment, work process or area is an effective way to reduce the risk of injury. Typical control measures may include but are not limited to:

- changing the physical design and layout of the workspace and equipment;
- focusing on reducing repetition, force, and exposure to awkward postures;
- revising tasks related to body movements to reduce strain;
- pacing and/or reducing the length of time at which a work task is performed; and,
- providing appropriate equipment or tools (e.g., adjustable/supportive chair, footrests, document holders, etc.).

The changes listed above are in order of recommended actions to be taken. A combination of controls is required in some cases.

After corrections are made it is important to follow up within a reasonable time period to determine if the actions have resolved concerns. Sometimes changes do not result in a solution, so further assessment and changes may be needed.

6. Resources and Tools

6.1 Tools

The following appendices are tools that can be used to provide assistance in managing ergonomic hazards:

- Appendix A: Ergonomic Assessment Process (Process Flowchart);
- Appendix B: Ergonomic Self-Assessment Checklist (Assessment tool for employees); and,
- Appendix C: [Adjusting and Adapting Your Computer Workstation Checklist - Health Canada \(Pictograph\)](#).

6.2 Additional Resources

The following resources are provided to further assist employees and supervisors in managing ergonomics within their units:

- [Computer Workstation Assessment Training](#) – WorkSafe Sask;
- [How to Make Your Computer Workstation Fit You](#) – WorkSafe BC;
- [Ergonomics Fact Sheets](#) – Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety; and,
- [Vehicle Ergonomics Best Practice Guide](#) – Highway Agency Department for Transport UK.

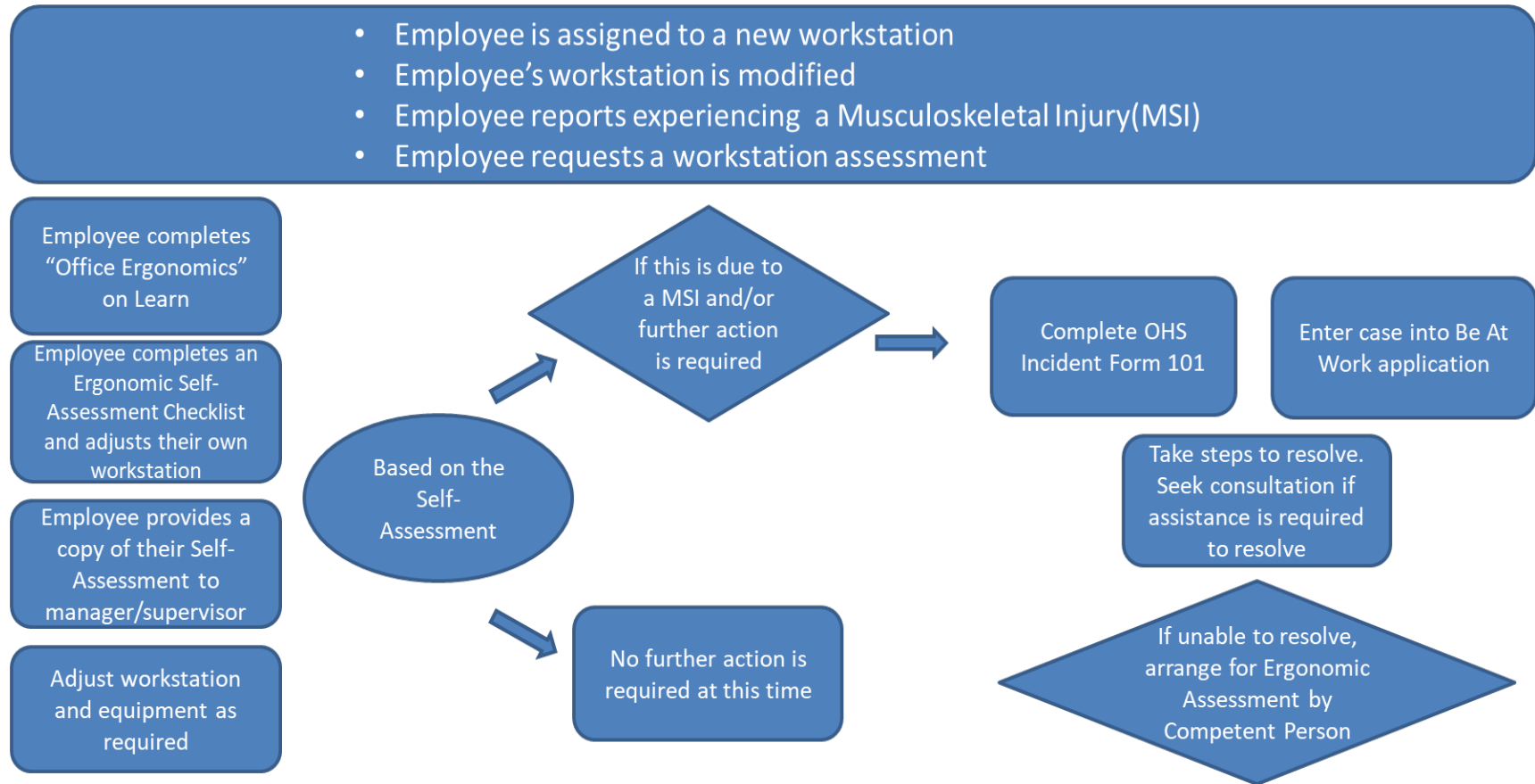
6.3 Supportive Policies

Supportive policies include:

- PS 704 Workers' Compensation;
- PS 705 Employment Accommodation; and,
- PS 818 Occupational Health and Safety Incident Reporting and Investigation.

For inquiries, please contact Integrated Health, Safety and Wellness Branch, 1-2350 Albert Street, Regina, SK S4P4A6 or Email us at ihswb@gov.sk.ca

Appendix A: Ergonomic Assessment Process (Process Flowchart)



Appendix B: Ergonomic Self-Assessment Checklist

EMPLOYEE NAME: _____

DATE: _____

DIVISION/WORK UNIT: _____

CITY/TOWN: _____

NAME OF SUPERVISOR: _____

This self-assessment checklist outlines basic office ergonomic requirements referenced in Saskatchewan OHS regulations and practices. Complete this checklist in conjunction with Appendix C - Health Canada's "Adjusting and Adapting Your Computer Workstation Checklist". Areas indicated by "NO" need to be addressed by your supervisor/manager.

I (employee) have completed [Learn Course - Office Ergonomics # 00043](#)

Yes/No	CHAIR	SUGGESTED CORRECTIONS
	1. Does my chair have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a five-point base with working wheels? • slide freely on the floor surface? • spin in a circle? • a backrest that can be adjusted up and down, and tilted forward and back? 	If not, check with your supervisor for an alternate chair. The chair must be able to move freely in your immediate workspace, and allow you to get up from your chair frequently to stretch your muscles.
	2. Is my back supported by the chair? Is the lumbar support positioned so the arch of the back rest matches the arch of my back?	If not, sit back in the chair and/or adjust the back rest angle and height to ensure upper and lower back is supported. If the chair is equipped with modular function that allows vertical adjustment of the back rest, adjust the back rest up and down to fit. This adjustment may require frequent re-adjustment due to vibration of the chair causing the back rest to slide downward.
	3. Is the height of my chair sufficient that my feet are flat on the floor with a 90° bend at the knee?	If not, adjust the height of the chair, keyboard tray or height of desk, if necessary. Having a chair that is too high will put pressure on the back of your thigh. This reduces blood flow to your lower legs. If you wear high heels or flats, you will have to adjust your chair height accordingly. If you are taller than average, your desk may have to be raised. If you are shorter than average, you may have to use a foot rest in order to raise your legs to the proper angle, or have a lower desk.
	4. Is the seat rounded in the front and does the size of the seat cushion allow me to sit completely back in the chair, with no pressure on the back of my knee – ample space?	If not, speak with your supervisor about getting a different chair for you. Different chairs have different seat sizes. Ensure your chair seat allows you to fit your fist behind your knee.

Yes/No	KEYBOARD and MOUSE	SUGGESTED CORRECTIONS
	5. Can my keyboard tray be adjusted up/down, in/out, and swing sideways?	If not, speak with your supervisor about obtaining an adjustable keyboard tray. If the keyboard needs adjusting, locate the adjustment features and make adjustments to optimize height and the degree of pitch on platform.
	6. Is my keyboard located at the front edge of the desk close to my body and centred with my body and the monitor?	If not, move your keyboard forward to enable the elbows to remain close to the body and keep it centrally aligned. The body works best when kept in a neutral position (90°, without pronation or deviation).
	7. When I am using the keyboard, are my elbows bent at approximately 90° angle to my upper arm, my wrist flat/straight and relaxed, with my elbows remaining close to my body? Are my shoulders relaxed and not hunched?	If not, either lower the keyboard or raise your chair. Your forearms should be approximately horizontal. Move elbows close to your body. Be sure the keyboard is laying flat and not at an angle. A slanted keyboard will force your wrists to bend while typing, leading to strain on your wrist.
	8. Are my wrists straight and horizontal when my fingers are on the keyboard?	If not, speak with your supervisor about obtaining palm support. Typing while resting your wrists limits free movement of your hands, and leads to strain on the hand/wrist.
	9. Is my mouse located beside the keyboard, at the same level as the keyboard?	If not, move the mouse next to the keyboard. Operating a mouse at a level different than your keyboard leads to strain on your shoulder, lower back and arm, as well as puts you at risk for repetitive strain injury as you reach from mouse to keyboard frequently.
	10. Can I operate the mouse without my whole body having to move forward?	If not, move your mouse and/or tray closer to you. Having to reach forward will put strain on your back, shoulder and arm. Your arm should be able to work from the same posture as your keyboard.
	11. When using the mouse, are my elbows bent at approximately 90° angle to my upper arm, my wrist flat/straight and relaxed, with my elbows remaining close to my body? Are my shoulders relaxed and not hunched?	If not, either lower the mouse tray or raise your chair. Your forearms should be approximately horizontal. Move elbows close to your body.
Yes/No	MONITOR / SCREEN	SUGGESTED CORRECTIONS
	12. Is my monitor positioned so my eyes are level with the top line of text, or the eyes are 2-6 inches below the top line of text, and my neck is in a neutral position (i.e. not looking up or down)?	If not, raise or lower the monitor. You may need to get a monitor stand. Bi-focal users should aim for at least 6 inches below eye level. Avoid having to look up at your screen – this leads to neck strain/pain.

	13. For a 14-inch monitor, is the viewing distance from my eyes to the screen between 30 to 70 cm (12 to 28 inches) or approximately an arm's length away, and directly in front of me? For a larger monitor, the screen should be 24-32 inches (60-80 cm) away.	If not, move the monitor screen. A distance closer or farther away places strain on the eyes. Be sure to look up from your screen every 20 minutes to focus on objects farther away to further reduce eye strain. Change the monitor background colour to less contrast, this may reduce eye strain, or call the HelpDesk for assistance.
	14. Do I know how to adjust the contrast and brightness control?	If not, look for push buttons or knobs on the monitor and adjust them to your needs. Changes in lighting in your office during the day may require adjustment to the contrast and brightness. Ensure the screen is clean and free of glare or shadows with no finger prints or dust.
	15. Are the images on the screen in focus, sharp, and easy to read and screen flicker free? Is the font easy to read without leaning backwards or forwards to view?	If you require a larger font or a change in the image quality, these adjustments can be found in your computer's "Control Panel" under "Display". Click the "Advanced" settings for more options to choose from, or call the HelpDesk for assistance.
	16. Do I use limited head/neck movements when looking at documents when typing?	If not, place a document holder between monitor and the keyboard or positioned next to the monitor.
	17. Is my monitor positioned so there is no glare or reflection on the screen?	If not, move the monitor away from direct light source, or ask your supervisor to arrange for purchase of an anti-glare screen.
Yes/No	GENERAL WORKSTATION	SUGGESTED CORRECTIONS
	18. Is the equipment that I frequently use within easy reach (e.g., phone, pens, stapler, cup, etc.)?	If not, rearrange items on your desk so frequently used objects are near to you. For example, if you answer the phone with your left hand, position the phone on the left side of your desk.
	19. Do I have sufficient legroom under my desk to change body positioning or stretch without getting up?	If not, clear away boxes or clutter under your desk to allow for leg movement. Make sure your legs will not get tangled in electrical or computer cords.
	20. Am I taking regular breaks from typing? Do I change my body and posture frequently, get up from my chair and take short movement breaks?	If not, remember to stand up and walk around regularly. Getting items off printer is good for this. Take a 2-3 minute break every 20-30 minutes and do stretching exercises. You can set a reminder alarm in your computer calendar.
	21. Is lighting adequate for my tasks?	If not, arrange with your supervisor to have lighting increased/decreased and/or adjust window coverings if possible. Use of a task light improves lighting on documents you are reading.
	22. Do I use the phone regularly? Do I keep my neck in an upright position when using the phone?	If not, ask your supervisor to consider purchasing a personal headset.

Provide a completed copy of this checklist to your supervisor/manager. Your supervisor/manager will work with you to resolve concerns if you have identified any.

If you experience on-going or regular pains, aches, soreness, numbness, tingling, swelling, burning feelings, muscle weakness, muscle tightness, changes in skin colour or difficulty in grasping or holding objects, inform your supervisor immediately.

<p>Employee Comments:</p>	<p>Supervisor Comments:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Recommend assessment by a "Competent Person"</p>
<p>Employee Signature:</p> <p>Date:</p>	<p>Supervisor Signature:</p> <p>Date:</p>

Appendix C: Adjusting and Adapting Your Workstation Checklist

[Adjusting and Adapting Your Workstation Checklist – Health Canada](#)