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Don't be taken in by elaborate designs: simple is often best

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Choosing a keyboard

Here are a few guidelines to follow when looking for a keyboard:

- Firstly, identify what's wrong with your current keyboard. This will help you look for improvements
- Try before you buy. How do the keys feel? What is the resistance to depression when keying? Do the keys spring back into place without affecting your movement? Do the keys feel solid or flimsy?
- If you plan to invest in a contoured keyboard or an angled/split keyboard be prepared to invest time in getting used to it. These types of keyboard do have the benefit of reducing the amount of deviation (sideways bending) at the wrists: larger individuals often find them especially beneficial for this reason. Be aware that, depending on your keying technique, a flared keyboard may not be suitable for you; in some cases, it may even make keying postures worse.
- If you do purely number inputting for significant periods of time then a split keyboard may help as it can be positioned to allow optimal posture. Conversely, if you rarely use the number pad it may be beneficial to invest in a 'mini' keyboard without a number pad. This allows the keyboard to be positioned centrally and the mouse used closer.
- Remember there are alternatives to the keyboard for data input such as voice activated software (VAS) and touch screen input.
- An 'ergonomic' keyboard is not necessarily the best way to reduce musculoskeletal loading: correct furniture and equipment arrangement, good typing technique, posture and work routines are often more effective means of tackling the physical demands of computer use.

Choosing a mouse

- Start by identifying what you mainly use your input device for. Do you scroll up and down large documents, for instance, or do design work? A graphics tablet is good for someone who draws a lot, while a device with an easy-to-use scroll function may suit someone using large spreadsheets.
- Don't be taken in by elaborate designs: simple ones are often better.
- Try the device before committing to purchase it. A quick play in the shop isn't going to give you a true idea of what it'll feel like after a couple of hours of use with your software.
- Avoid devices that put your body into awkward postures. Think about the effect on your fingers, hands, wrists, forearms, elbows, upper arms, neck and even back.
- Avoid devices that demand lots of gripping.
- Avoid devices that demand repetitive or prolonged contractions of your fingers, wrists or forearms.
- Many input devices claim to be 'ergonomic': don't let this label carry too much weight.

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MDG HEALTH

It can be hard maintaining good posture, so choose a chair that supports you properly

Choosing a laptop bag

There are four main types of laptop bag on the market: back pack; wheeled case; combination of the two (back pack that converts to a roller bag); and briefcase.

When choosing a laptop bag , consider:

- The load you have to transport
- Your mode of travel
- Your distance or time of travel
- What feels comfortable

Remember to consider laptop weight if you'll be carrying it around a lot. Only carry what's essential and can't be stored electronically; paperwork can contribute significantly to the load.

Our bodies tolerate symmetrical loads better than asymmetrical ones, so a back pack is the best option, worn over both shoulders with the straps adjusted to fit snugly so that the load is close to the body.

Wheeled cases are good for larger loads and where prolonged periods of walking or standing are required. The height of the handle should be above hip height, so you don't have to hunch.

Wheeled cases can require repetitive lifting. e.g. to go up and down stairs, which can cause adverse stresses on the spine's soft tissues. A combination back pack/roller case may be the solution in these cases.

Choosing an office chair

The secret to a good chair is adjustability. We all have different-sized legs, arms and spines, so try to find a chair which can be adjusted to support you in a good sitting posture. Your spine should be in an 's' shape with your lower back in an arched position. It can be hard maintaining good posture, so it's all the more important that the chair does the hard work of properly supporting you.

When choosing your chair, ensure that:

- It has a five base support and swivels through 360 degrees.
- The seatpan height is adjustable to allow you to sit at the correct height.
- The seatpan depth is a few centimeters short of your thigh length, supporting most of your thigh but not compressing the back of your knee, so you can sit right back in the seat.
- The backrest offers good lumbar support and if necessary is height-adjustable to fit you correctly.
- The backrest/seatpan angle is adjustable, preferably independent of one another, so that you can find a comfortable position.
- The glides/castors are appropriate for the floor on which the chair is used.
- The seat cushioning distributes your pressure evenly.
- The chair feels sturdy and robust.

Adjusting your chair

- Raise the seatpan height so that your elbows are just above desk height when you are sitting with your arms by your side. When you place your fingers on the home keys of your keyboard, your forearms should be horizontal.
- Adjust the depth of the seatpan. Your back should be in contact with the backrest and there should be about an inch or more between the front of the seat and the back of your lower legs.
- Adjust the backrest height so that the backrest bulge fits into your lumbar arch.
- Adjust the tilt of the backrest so that it is comfortable; this is usually a few degrees into a reclined position. Remember to pull it well into the desk.
- If you have a synchro or freefloat chair, set the backrest tension (resistance) to suit you and your weight.
- Adjust your armrests so that they don't prevent access to the desk. They shouldn't cause your shoulders to hunch up.
- You will need a footrest if your feet are not well supported on the floor.
- Make sure that other furniture and equipment is well arranged: the benefit of using a good chair can be undone by having to twist to see a poorly positioned PC screen.
- Make sure your chair fits under your desk.
- Don't perch on the edge of your chair to reach forward to your desk.

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