



**HABINTEG**  
Disability Equality Centre

## **Office Seating.**

In this fact sheet, 'office seating' refers to adjustable chairs for use at a workstation, where the user is performing typical computer and paper based tasks. Such chairs should conform to the relevant Health and Safety requirements.

The range of office seating designs is vast, with differing adjustments and features to suit various user requirements. A user might require a chair with additional lumbar support or with a tilting seat to enable a seated posture better suited to their particular requirements. A user may be of shorter or taller stature, than 'average', and require a chair of appropriate proportions. A user may have specific requirements, based on medical advice, and if 'off the shelf' chairs do not provide the necessary support, then chairs can be custom built to match those requirements.

A chair will not automatically give you good seated posture - it depends on how you use that chair; but some chair designs, with the appropriate support and adjustment, can encourage you to maintain a healthier seated posture. Make sure that you know how to adjust your chair, and adjust it to provide the best support during a particular work task.

It is advisable not to remain seated for long periods of time and it is suggested that short frequent breaks from computer work will be more effective than longer breaks taken less often. A break does not necessarily mean a rest break, but could be achieved by a change of task. Try to arrange work tasks in such a way as to allow you to get out of your chair frequently, to avoid sitting in the same posture for long periods.



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A chair with a good range of adjustments can provide appropriate seating for more than one user, for example, in a hot-desking situation where various people may use the same chair throughout the day. Some chairs are designed for twenty four hour use, and are built more robustly for such use. Other chairs are designed for use in particular environments, using certain materials or incorporating certain design features.

A chair may be improved with the use of separate back supports or seat cushions, such as a lumbar roll to support the 'small' of the back, or a wedge cushion to create a forward tilting seat. There are many designs for use in office chairs, seating at home, or in car seats. There are also portable designs that may be useful for people who use a variety of office chairs during their working day.

The following is general advice to promote a healthier seated posture in the office, as suggested by a number of sources of advice listed in this fact sheet. Specific guidance for an individual's requirements should be sought from their 'back specialist'.

- As a user should adjust a chair to suit each work task, and a chair may be used (and adjusted) by several people, the positioning of adjustment levers should be considered to allow easy adjustment for all users when seated.
- The seat must be height adjustable. When the chair height is positioned to allow a good computer keying posture or access to the desk top, the users feet should be able to rest firmly on the floor or be supported by a suitable foot rest.
- The user should not feel as though their legs are dangling from the chair. Chairs are available with differing gas lift stem heights to



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accommodate users of differing statures and workstations of differing heights.

- When working at the desk, the seat should not be reclined. The seat should be level or tilted slightly forwards - sit with the hip higher than the knee. A slightly forward tilting seat rotates the pelvis, bringing its top forwards, to restore the natural curvature of the lower spine.
- The back rest should be slightly reclined, so the body is held in balance with full lumbar support. You should be able to position your chair to the workstation, so that you remain in contact with the chair back rest.
- The posture created by a slightly forward tilting seat and a slightly reclined back rest is described as an 'open pelvic angle' (110° to 115°), which is said to give minimum pressure on the lumbar discs, and reduce extension of the back musculature (muscular system).
- Users who are taller or shorter than 'average' may need a chair with a suitably proportioned seat to accommodate their leg length. Many chairs are available with different sized seat pans, and some designs have a sliding seat facility. Some chairs have split seats that allow the users legs to be supported at differing angles.
- Likewise with the back rest, some users prefer smaller back rests, others higher back rests. General guidance suggests that a back rest needs to be as high as the lower shoulder blades. It must be height adjustable and/or a full height back rest, and have rake adjustment.
- Some users are advised to have lower lumbar support that supports the 'small' of the back. However too large a lumbar support, or one which is in the wrong place on the users back, should be avoided.



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Others find lumbar/kidney support, which wraps around the back, more supportive.

- There should be a gap of about 5cms between the front edge of the seat and the back of the knee. This gap should reduce the possibility of restricting blood circulation to the lower leg. Users may be given specific medical advice to have a full length seat, one which comes closer behind the knee, but generally you should ensure the seat depth provides a suitable gap. Some seat cushions have a shaped or cascading front edge to help achieve this gap.
- Chairs with movement such as rocking or floating action, sometimes described as dynamic seating where the seat moves with the user, can assist with blood circulation, i.e. rocking the chair can increase muscular activity in the lower limbs.
- Height adjustable arm rests can make a chair useable at more workstation designs. Often a chair is not utilized fully, because the arm rests prevent the user positioning the chair close enough to the workstation. Some arm rests are designed to support the arms whilst working and can ease tension in the neck and shoulders. Some users prefer not to have arm rests.
- The amount of cushioning to the seat and back (softer or firmer) as well as the fabric used to cover the chair are issues which may need consideration for an individual's requirements or personal preference.
- A chair with a seat that swivels 360° and is on castors, can assist with movement around the workstation. Alternatives to castors are available for use on different floor surfaces. Some chairs can be fitted with a wheel breaking facility.



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- If using a chair with gas lift height adjustment, ensure the gas lift stem is appropriate for the users body weight. The average weight capacity appears to be up to sixteen stones, but this should be confirmed with the chair manufacturer. Some gas lifts are designed to accommodate weights up to thirty five stones.

## **Some suppliers who specialise in seating and/or back care products, plus other sources of advice.**

### **Disabled Living Foundation (DLF) Helpline**

Telephone: 0845 130 9177

Textphone: 020 7432 8009

website: [www.dlf.org.uk](http://www.dlf.org.uk)

- range of useful fact sheets on their website

**Osmond Group Limited**, 21 Johnson Road, Fernside Business Park,  
Ferndown Industrial Estate, Wimborne BH21 7SE

Telephone: 01202 850 550

Fax: 01202 850 560

email: [info@ergonomics.co.uk](mailto:info@ergonomics.co.uk)

website: [www.ergonomics.co.uk](http://www.ergonomics.co.uk)

- An example of a supplier offering an extensive range of ergonomic furniture and equipment

**Posture Point**, 7 Lundy Court, Rougham Industrial Estate,  
Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP22 2PU

Telephone: 01359 271861

Fax: 01359 271862

email: [info@posture.co.uk](mailto:info@posture.co.uk)

website: [www.posture.co.uk](http://www.posture.co.uk)

- They say they can source almost any ergonomic chair currently made and, if required, provide unbiased, specialist advice on the features



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and benefits of each style and model. Their full range of chairs can be viewed at website [www.ergonomic-chairs.com](http://www.ergonomic-chairs.com).

**Posturite (UK) Ltd**, 10 Diplocks Way, Hailsham, East Sussex BN27 3JF

Telephone: 01323 847777

Fax: 01323 847799

email: [support@posturite.co.uk](mailto:support@posturite.co.uk)

website: [www.posturite.co.uk](http://www.posturite.co.uk)

**The Back Shop**, 14 New Cavendish Street, London W1G 8UW

Telephone: 020 7935 9120 / 9148

Fax: 020 7224 1903

email: [info@thebackshop.co.uk](mailto:info@thebackshop.co.uk)

website: [www.thebackshop.co.uk](http://www.thebackshop.co.uk)

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