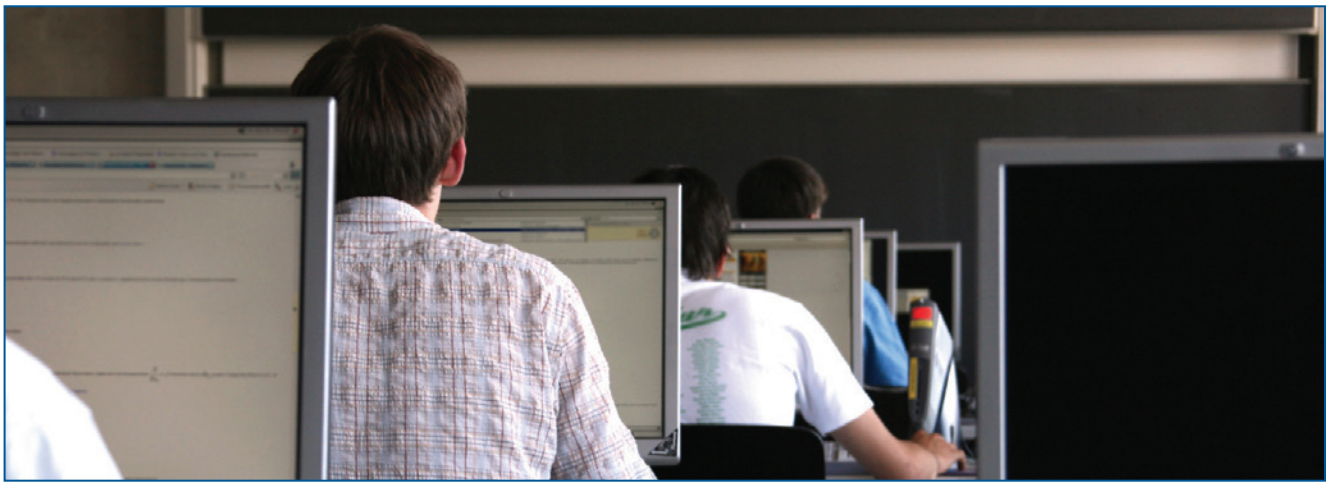

# Straightening up at the Office

BY **SHARI FEUZ AND ROB WILLIAMS**

Is your computer interfering with your productivity and good looks?

You played all summer long, but now that you're back at the workstation full time, the old creaks and cracks have come back. That ache in your lower back is starting up again, and the burning sensation in your neck has returned as well. What's the link? The return of winter and its cooler, shorter days is often coupled with a drastic decrease in physical activity levels. Summer activities such as hiking, rollerblading, kayaking, and tennis demand an array of functions from the muscles and joints; bending, rotating, squatting, extending, lunging, and squatting keep the muscles supple. When activity declines in winter there is no counter to the static computing postures held at a workstation for hours on end. The result is muscle stiffness and tightness, which, left unchecked, results in postural deviations such as anterior head carriage (head forward posture) and rounded shoulders. Both of these conditions are as physically problematic as they are aesthetically displeasing.

### Problem? What problem?

Poor computer setup leads to poor posture. A few quick adjustments can fix your posture problems in no time.

### Heads Up!

To prevent your head from leaning forward adjust your chair's height and distance from the monitor. Sitting tall, with your back against the back of your chair, place the monitor at an arm's length away from you and be sure that your eyes are level with the top line of text in your documents.

### Just a Hunch

Don't stoop or hunch or round your shoulders. Position your keyboard (on an adjustable tray if necessary) so that when your shoulders are back and down your forearms are parallel with your thighs with your wrists slightly lower than your elbows.

### Computer Gut

You don't really want weak abdominals and a protruding abdomen, do you? Sitting for extended periods of time causes the muscles of the hip flexors and the lower back to become short and tight. This will tilt the pelvis forward and 'turn off' the abdominal muscles, allowing them to relax, weaken, and protrude. Take frequent breaks to stand and stretch the lower back and hips.

### Fat Ankles

Reduce pressure on the back of the thighs and increase circulation by adjusting the height and depth of your chair. Avoid sitting in a chair with a seatpan that tilts backward. Try to keep your feet flat on the floor or on a footrest, and avoid tucking your feet under your chair.

### The Eyes Have Had It

Remember to blink frequently and periodically look away from the computer screen to keep the eyes moist. To prevent squinting and eye muscle fatigue, try increasing the font size on your computer documents, and use a document holder placed in line with the monitor. Poor task lighting and monitor glare is also an issue. ➤

RECLINING—THE NEW WAY TO COMPUTE

## THE FUTURE OF OFFICE ERGONOMICS LOOKS COMFY

While La-z-boys won't be making appearances at computer workstations anytime soon, the latest in ergonomic computing has us reclining at our desks. Yes, reclining. Gone are the days of upright ninety-degree posture. In a recent presentation to over 125 Vancouver health and wellness specialists, leading ergonomist Dr. Alan Hedge dismissed the typical erect sitting posture. The director of Cornell University's Human Factors and Ergonomics Research Group, Hedge identified the roots of erect sitting as a philosophy from old British schools where "discomfort strengthen[ed] character." Research indicates that sitting erect is simply not sustainable, nor is it healthy. A reclined position is the better way to sit. Postural muscle activity, lumbar (lower back) disc pressure, and stress on the spine and neck musculature are all lower in a reclined angle of between 100 and 110 degrees. According to Cornell University's *Guide to Choosing an Ergonomic Chair,* a suitable chair should recline easily while providing back support that tracks the natural curves of the spine during various reclining positions. So tilt back, stretch out, and keep this article handy if your boss walks in and wonders why you're lounging.

# Posture $R_X$: Exercise prescription for the office worker

No time to play? Here are six exercise musts to include in your workout to prevent computer-related aches, pains, and fatigue.

## Exercise #1:
### Chest Stretch

Why do this? Pectoral muscles become tight from too much forward work at the computer. Stretching them regularly will prevent excessive pull on the shoulders.

## Exercise #2:
### Resisted Torso Rotation

Why do this? Healthy spines rotate. In the absence or golf swings, tennis backhands, and kayak paddling, the spine needs to keep turning.

## Exercise #3:
### Around the World Lunges

Why do this? Keep the glutes and legs strong and the hips mobile to offset long hours of sitting with the hips flexed and the gluteus lengthened. Lunging forward, backward, and to the side requires multidirectional movement of the hip joint, much like the movements required when hiking steep and varied terrain, manoeuvring on the tennis court, and rollerblading.

## Exercise #4:
### Isolateral (Single-Arm) Row

Why do this? Without summer activities such as canoeing and kayaking to keep upper back muscles (latissimus, rhomboids) strong and conditioned, they weaken and elongate, making them unable to counter the chest muscles from pulling the shoulders forward.

## Exercise #5:
### Hip Flexor Stretch

Why do this? Sitting for long periods of time causes the hip flexors to tighten and shorten. Regularly stretching will prevent them from pulling the pelvis out of alignment into an anterior (forward) tilt.

## Exercise #6:
### Prone Cobra

Why do this? It's a good idea to counter all of the forward bending done at the computer all day. A safe extension such as the prone cobra pose is a great chest opener and helps to increase flexibility in the spine.

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