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OFFICE ERGONOMICS: THE EVIL-UTION OF LAPTOPS

The biggest cause or aggravating factor of headaches, cervical (neck), lumbar, shoulder and even wrist pain (repetitive strain injury or carpal tunnel syndrome) is poor sitting posture at work. When you spend 6 to 12 hours at work in front of a computer (PC or Laptop) with bad posture you will eventually have musculoskeletal pain within a few weeks although sometimes it can take years before the pain manifests. The most important ergonomic ingredients to a pain free, office friendly environment are (1) a spacious **desk**, (2) lumbar support, height and backrest adjustable **chair**, (3) height and distance of the computer **screen** and (4) ergonomic **keyboard and mouse**. But over the last decade laptops or notebooks have become very popular and have taken over from the traditional PC's in the work place because they are convenient and portable but not designed for everyday use!

Why? Because the laptop screen is too low causing you to look down, instead of straight ahead. When looking down you will automatically alter your sitting posture by slouching in your chair altering your lumbar posture that will affect your cervical and shoulder alignment adversely. Any sustained posture with the shoulders and lower back rounded and head flexed forward will cause excessive strain on the muscles as they are being overstretched, therefore getting fatigued and tightening up due to spasm, hence you get headaches, neck and shoulder pain.



So what is the solution? A very simple solution when using a laptop, besides making sure that the desk and chair ergonomics are correct, is getting a laptop stand or lift, to raise the screen to eye level, thus preventing you from slouching in your chair and compensating with adverse posture in the shoulders and neck. Once the screen is at eye level your hands should rest on the keyboard with the forearms supported on the desk preventing your elbows from hanging unsupported straining the neck and trapezius muscles. You can always add an external keyboard and mouse to the laptop if the angle of the laptop stand is too inclined. The touch pad should only be used when traveling as it creates a lot of stress on the wrist and forearm due to the small repetitive movements.

