

DESK DOCTOR

DESK DOCTOR GUIDE · SETUP

Desk *setup* guide

The standard for every part of your workstation — chair, desk, laptop, keyboard, mouse, monitor, lighting, documents and phone — with good-vs-bad examples.

By AJ Prince, HEAS · Desk Doctor

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Keyboard	PG. 12	Mouse	PG. 15
Monitor	PG. 19	Lighting	PG. 24
Documents	PG. 26	Phone	PG. 28

Get your exact numbers

The free assessment sets your seat height, desk height and gear.

TAKE THE FREE ASSESSMENT

DESK SETUP CHECKLIST · 1 OF 2

Your desk setup *checklist*

Work through each box. Anything you can't tick is your next fix — the page number takes you to the how-to.



Chair

DETAILS PG. 4 →

- ☐ Height set so thighs are parallel to the floor
- ☐ Tilt back to 110–130°
- ☐ Lumbar and neck supports match your spine's curves
- ☐ Armrests let your shoulders fully relax
- ☐ Sit all the way back against the backrest
- ☐ Learn every lever on your chair — video walkthroughs



Desk

DETAILS PG. 7 →

- ☐ Legroom at least 24″ wide and 20″ deep
- ☐ Wide enough for keyboard, mouse and materials
- ☐ At least 24″ deep for proper monitor distance
- ☐ Consider sit-stand capability to vary your posture
- ☐ Anti-fatigue mat if standing 2+ hours a day
- ☐ Chair rolls freely — right casters or a chair mat



Laptop

DETAILS PG. 10 →

- ☐ External keyboard and mouse if on a laptop 2+ hours a day
- ☐ Laptop stand if on a laptop 2+ hours a day



Keyboard

DETAILS PG. 12 →

- ☐ At elbow height with relaxed shoulders
- ☐ As close to your body as possible
- ☐ Middle of your body lines up with the spacebar
- ☐ Wrists straight, not bent up, while typing
- ☐ Palm support if needed to keep wrists straight



Mouse

DETAILS PG. 15 →

- ☐ Directly beside the keyboard
- ☐ Wrists straight while mousing
- ☐ Hold it with a completely relaxed hand
- ☐ Move from the elbow, not the wrist
- ☐ Faster cursor and scroll speed if mousing 2+ hours a day

DESK SETUP CHECKLIST · 2 OF 2



Monitor

DETAILS PG. 19 →

- ☐ Eyes level with the top of the screen
- ☐ 20–30″ away (one monitor) or 35–40″ (multiple)
- ☐ Centered on the spacebar (one) or split evenly (two)
- ☐ Use the center most, right side next, left side least



Lighting

DETAILS PG. 24 →

- ☐ Room light between 100–500 lux — add task lamps if needed
- ☐ Task lighting for documents or keyboard visibility
- ☐ Monitor brightness, tone and text size set for comfort
- ☐ Blue light protection for 2+ hours of daily screen use
- ☐ Lights placed to minimize glare on the screen



Documents

DETAILS PG. 26 →

- ☐ Document stand if you use papers while computing
- ☐ Stand close, ideally between screen and keyboard
- ☐ Or directly beside the monitor
- ☐ Calendar reminder to review your paper workflow
- ☐ Digitize workflows to cut paper handling



Phone

DETAILS PG. 28 →

- ☐ Phone on the desk surface, not raised
- ☐ As close as possible if using it 2+ hours a day
- ☐ Headset if on calls 2+ hours a day
- ☐ Phone on your non-writing side so you never cradle it
- ☐ Calendar reminder to review your phone workflow

Want it checked against your body?

The free assessment uses your height, hand size and pain areas to set your exact chair height, desk height and equipment.

TAKE THE ASSESSMENT

CHAIR · THE STANDARD

The perfect *chair* setup

Your chair is the foundation of desk work. Set correctly, it holds the natural curves of your spine, takes load off your lower back and lets your shoulders and arms work relaxed. Set poorly, it pushes your body into compensating postures that add strain everywhere else.

KEY SETUP TIPS

Height: thighs parallel to the floor, knees at 90° or more

Tilt: lean back 110–130° — not upright at 90°, never forward

Lumbar support: matches the curve of your lower back

Armrests: shoulders fully relaxed — remove them if they're too short for your torso

Position: sit fully back against the backrest

Knowledge: learn every lever so you can adjust daily — video walkthroughs

WHERE A POOR SETUP SHOWS UP

Neck: chair height pushes your head forward or back to see the screen

Shoulders: armrests or chair height keep your shoulders raised

Hips: seat height puts pressure on the hips or tips the thighs off parallel

Back: no lumbar support, an upright backrest or a height that breaks spinal alignment

SEE IT DONE RIGHT

Photo examples of a good and a bad chair setup, point by point.

Good vs bad, pg. 5 →



EQUIPMENT WE RANKED

Ergonomic chairs →

Footrests →

Seat cushions →

READ THE RESEARCH

How to sit without lower back pain →

What research says about sitting time and back pain →

Check your chair in 10 minutes

The assessment calculates your ideal seat height and depth from your height and desk.

TAKE THE ASSESSMENT

GOOD VS BAD

Chair setup







DO THIS

1. Sitting reclined
2. Full contact with the backrest
3. Keyboard at elbow height
4. Thighs parallel to the floor
5. Feet flat on the floor or a footrest

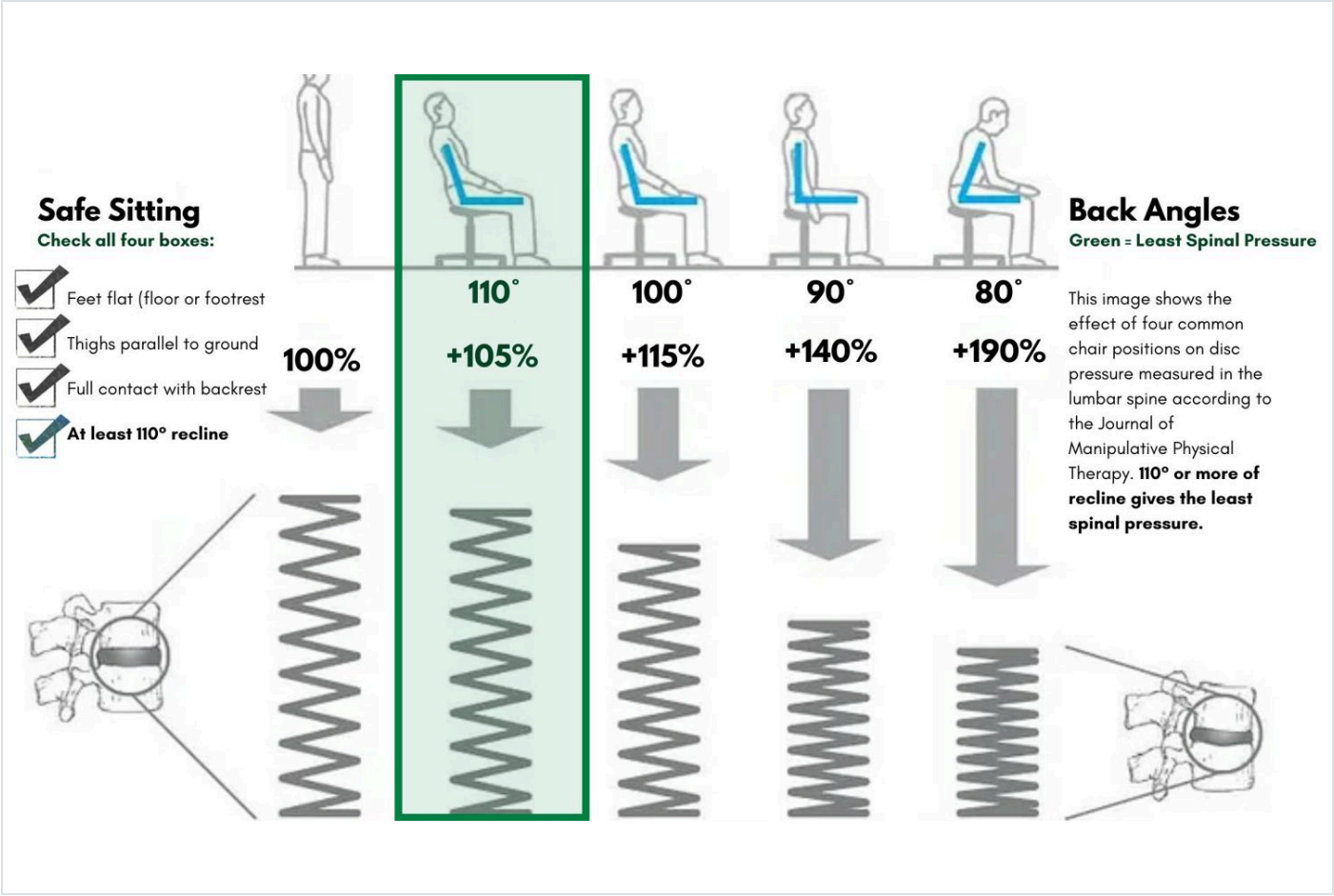
AVOID THIS

1. No recline
2. No contact with the backrest
3. Thighs not parallel to the floor

CHAIR · WHY RECLINE

Why sit with *recline?*

Classic disc-pressure studies found that a supported recline of about 110° loads the lower spine less than sitting bolt upright — and far less than leaning forward. Upright 90° sitting, which many people assume is correct, adds load. Hunching forward toward the screen adds the most.



RECLINED 110–130°
Backrest carries part of your upper body. Lowest load of the three.

UPRIGHT 90°
Your spine and muscles hold everything. Moderate load.

LEANING FORWARD
Highest load — and the default when the screen or keyboard is too far away.

Recline only works if your screen and keyboard come with you: keep the monitor at eye level and arm's length, and the keyboard close, so you don't drift forward. Read more: How to sit without lower back pain →

DESK · THE STANDARD

The perfect *desk* setup

Your desk sets the height and reach of everything on it. The wrong height makes you hunch, lift your shoulders or bend your wrists. Too little legroom forces awkward sitting. Too shallow and your monitor ends up too close; too narrow and you reach and twist all day.

KEY SETUP TIPS

Legroom: 24″+ wide and 20″+ deep, nothing blocking your legs

Work surface: room for keyboard, mouse and materials without crowding

Depth: at least 24″ so the monitor can sit 20–30″ away

Height: keyboard and mouse at elbow level

Sit-stand: adjustable height lets you change posture through the day

Standing: anti-fatigue mat if standing 2+ hours a day

Chair mobility: casters or a chair mat suited to your floor

WHERE A POOR SETUP SHOWS UP

Neck: desk height puts the monitor too low or high

Shoulders: reaching forward, or shoulders lifted to a high work surface

Hips & legs: cramped legroom limits position changes and leg circulation

Back: a deep reach or wrong height pulls you into a slouch

SEE IT DONE RIGHT

Photo examples of a good and a bad desk setup, point by point.

Good vs bad, pg. 8 →



EQUIPMENT WE RANKED

- Standing desks →
- Desk converters →
- Anti-fatigue mats →
- Chair mats →

READ THE RESEARCH

- Standing desks and low back pain: the research →
- What research says about desks and low back pain →
- Desk setup for shorter people →

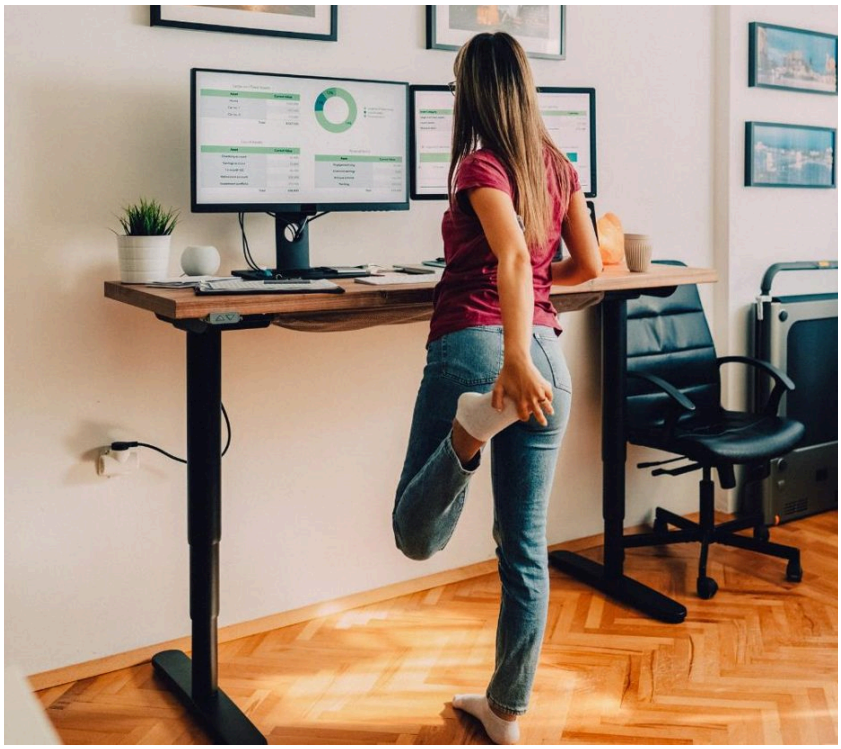
Check your desk in 10 minutes

The assessment checks your desk height against your body and picks a fix if it's off.

TAKE THE ASSESSMENT

GOOD VS BAD

Desk setup



DO THIS

1. Desk height adjustable
2. Space under the desk is clear
3. Surface big enough for your work



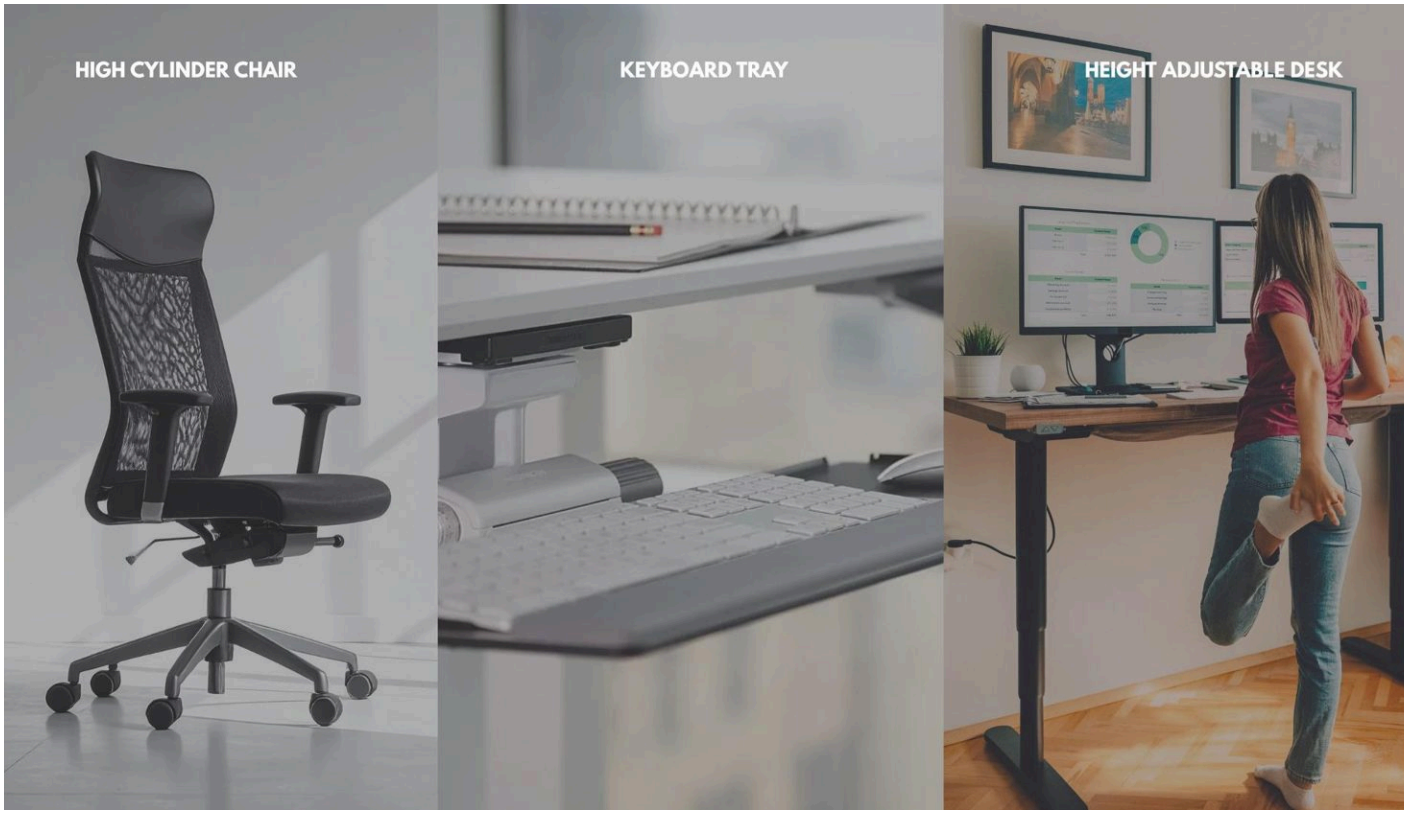
AVOID THIS

1. Desk height not adjustable
2. Drawers under the desk block your legs, so you lean forward to reach your work

DESK · WHEN THE HEIGHT IS OFF

Desk height *solutions*

A desk that's too high for you is one of the most common causes of poor posture and shoulder, arm and back pain. You have three ways to fix it so you can sit back properly with your keyboard and mouse at elbow height.



OPTION 1 · SIMPLEST

Higher chair + footrest

Raise the chair until your elbows reach desk height, then support your feet with a footrest.

Chairs → Footrests →

OPTION 2 · KEEP YOUR DESK

Keyboard tray

Drops the keyboard and mouse below the desk surface to elbow height.

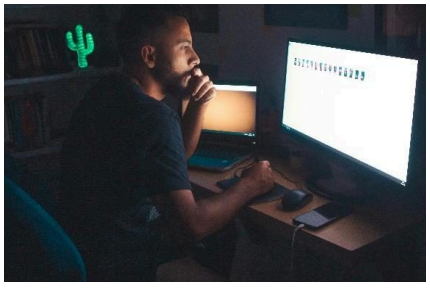
Keyboard trays →

OPTION 3 · MOST FLEXIBLE

Adjustable desk

Set the exact height for sitting and standing — or add a converter on top.

Desks → Converters →



THE PROBLEM

When the desk is too high you lean forward and lift your shoulders to reach your work — loading the neck, shoulders, arms and back.

Which one fits you?

The assessment picks it from your height and desk.

FIND OUT FREE

LAPTOP · THE STANDARD

The perfect *laptop* setup

Laptops force a trade-off: a screen at the right height with your hands too high, or comfortable typing with your head bent down. That conflict makes a bare laptop a poor tool for long days — it's behind "tech neck" and a forward head habit.

KEY SETUP TIPS

Laptop stand: screen top at eye level, 20–30″ away

External keyboard: at elbow level with relaxed shoulders

External mouse: sized for your hand, right beside the keyboard

Document stand: if you work from papers

Laptop-only, short term: max 30 minutes at a stretch, pushed to arm's length, text at 125–150%, a break every 20–30 minutes

WHERE A POOR SETUP SHOWS UP

Tech neck: constant downward viewing keeps the neck bent

Forward head: long laptop use trains a head-forward habit

Shoulders: the narrow keyboard rolls the shoulders in and forward

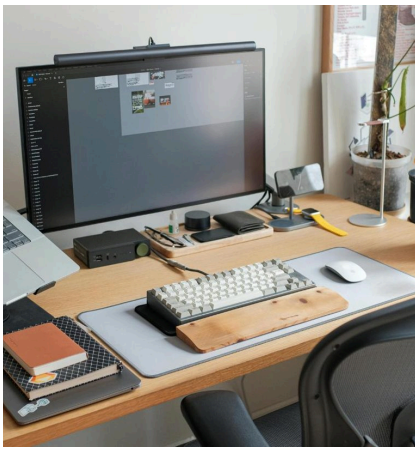
Wrists: a low, compact keyboard bends the wrists up and cramps the fingers

Eyes: close distance and small text increase visual effort

SEE IT DONE RIGHT

Photo examples of a good and a bad laptop setup, point by point.

Good vs bad, pg. 11 →



EQUIPMENT WE RANKED

Laptop stands →
Portable keyboard & mouse →

READ THE RESEARCH

How to fix tech neck →
Why does my neck hurt after sitting at a computer? →

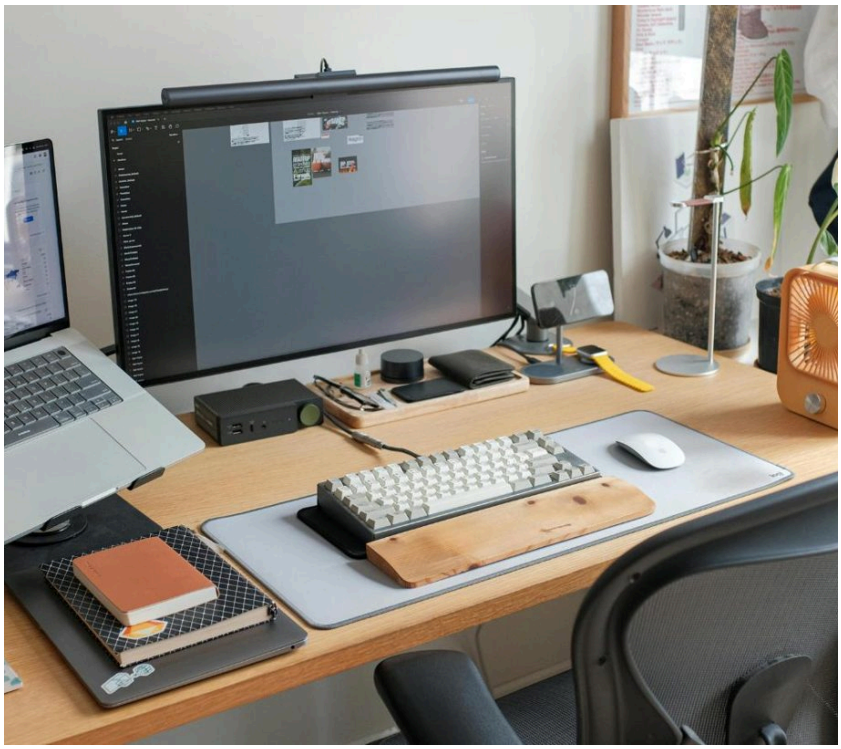
Check your laptop in 10 minutes

The assessment checks your laptop hours and travel, and picks a stand and portable kit.

TAKE THE ASSESSMENT

GOOD VS BAD

Laptop setup



DO THIS

1. Laptop on a stand with the screen at eye level
2. External keyboard and mouse



AVOID THIS

1. Laptop flat on the desk bends the neck forward
2. No external keyboard or mouse — strains the wrists and rules out a stand

KEYBOARD · THE STANDARD

The perfect *keyboard* setup

Keyboard position drives your shoulder, arm and wrist mechanics. Too high, too far or angled wrong and you lift your shoulders, bend your wrists or reach forward. Set right, your arms hang relaxed at your sides and your wrists stay straight.

KEY SETUP TIPS

Height: elbow level, shoulders relaxed, arms at your sides

Distance: as close as comfortable — no reaching

Alignment: center your body on the spacebar so you don't twist

Wrists: straight — add a palm support if needed

Laptop users: use a separate keyboard

Upgrade: an ergonomic layout if your wrists or elbows hurt

WHERE A POOR SETUP SHOWS UP

Neck: a high keyboard lifts the shoulders and pushes the head forward

Shoulders: raised to a high keyboard, or reaching for a far one

Wrists & hands: bent wrists and repetitive typing in awkward positions

Elbows: awkward elbow angles tense the forearm muscles

SEE IT DONE RIGHT

Photo examples of a good and a bad keyboard setup, point by point.

Good vs bad, pg. 13 →



EQUIPMENT WE RANKED

Ergonomic keyboards →

Palm supports →

Keyboard trays →

READ THE RESEARCH

What the research says about ergonomic keyboards →

What research says about carpal tunnel syndrome →

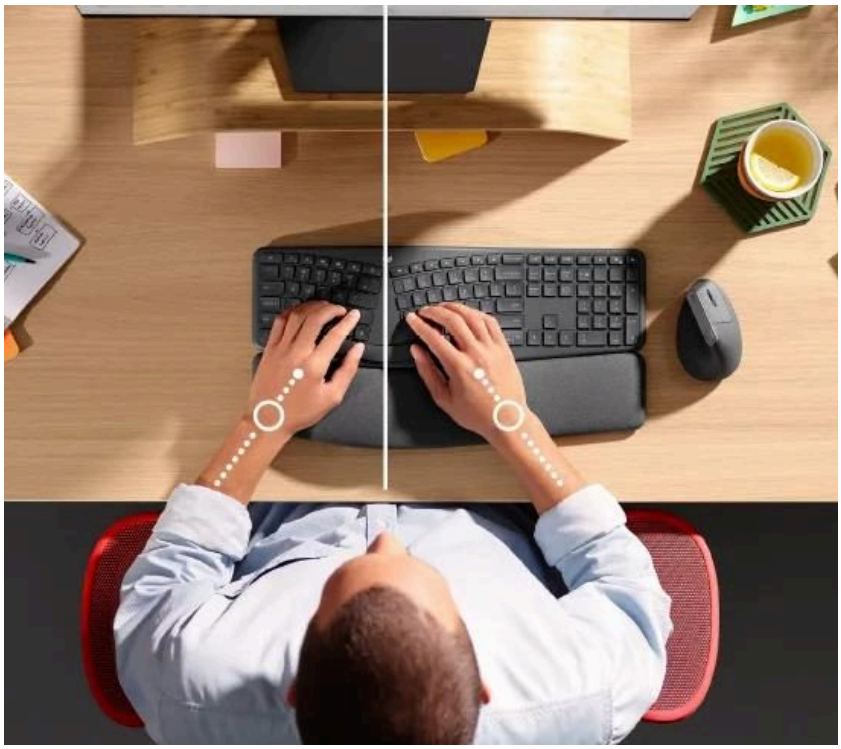
Check your keyboard in 10 minutes

The assessment matches a keyboard style and size to your pain and height.

TAKE THE ASSESSMENT

GOOD VS BAD

Keyboard setup



DO THIS

1. Wave design reduces sideways wrist bend
2. Palm support keeps wrists neutral
3. Keyboard at elbow height
4. Elbows close to the body, under the shoulders — no reaching



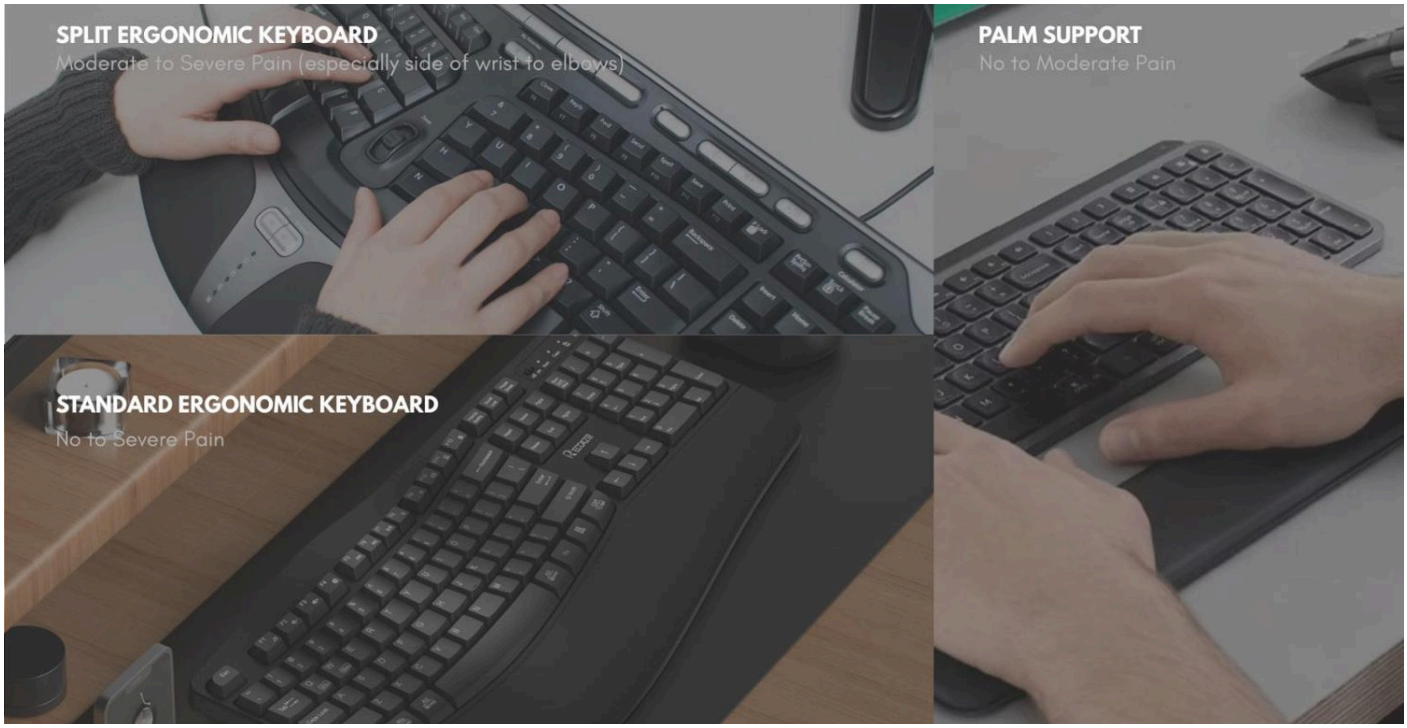
AVOID THIS

1. No palm support; wrists bent up
2. Arms extended, elbows away from the body, reaching for the keyboard

KEYBOARD · OPTIONS

Which keyboard option is *best for you?*

Ergonomic keyboards form a ladder, from least to most aggressive. Start at the rung that matches your symptoms; step up if symptoms persist or worsen.



STEP 1

Palm support

For: Mild, occasional wrist ache

Any keyboard plus a cushioned rest to keep wrists straight.

See picks →

STEP 2

Basic ergonomic

For: Mild wrist symptoms

Built-in palm rest and a gentle slope.

See picks →

STEP 3

Wave

For: Wrist plus mild elbow symptoms

A curved key bed that reduces sideways wrist bend.

See picks →

STEP 4

Split

For: Moderate wrist and elbow pain

Two halves spaced to shoulder width; less forearm twist.

See picks →

STEP 5

Advanced split

For: Frequent, severe wrist and elbow pain

Fully separate halves with tenting — the most neutral position.

See picks →

SIZE MATTERS TOO

Shorter users: compact or tenkeyless (no number pad) keeps the mouse closer. Taller users can run full-size without over-reaching.

Let the assessment choose the rung

It reads your wrist and elbow pain and your height, then filters the top-ranked keyboard to your size.

TAKE THE ASSESSMENT

MOUSE · THE STANDARD

The perfect *mouse* setup

Unlike typing, mousing loads one arm with nearly all the repetition, so setup matters more. Set right, the arm moves from the elbow and shoulder while the wrist stays still and neutral. Set poorly, the wrist and forearm do the work.

KEY SETUP TIPS

Position: right beside the keyboard, same height

Distance: as close to your body as possible

Wrists: straight — choose a mouse that fits your hand

Grip: relaxed hand, no death grip

Movement: move from the elbow and shoulder, not the wrist

Speed: raise cursor and scroll speed if you mouse heavily

Laptop users: use a separate mouse

WHERE A POOR SETUP SHOWS UP

Neck: a far or high mouse lifts the shoulder and tenses the neck

Shoulders: repeated reaching for a mouse that's too far away

Wrists & hands: side-bending, gripping hard, wrist-driven movement

Elbows: repeated forearm twisting when the wrist does the work

SEE IT DONE RIGHT

Photo examples of a good and a bad mouse setup, point by point.

Good vs bad, pg. 16 →



EQUIPMENT WE RANKED

Ergonomic mice →

Mouse pads →

READ THE RESEARCH

What the research says about mouse use and wrist pain →

Check your mouse in 10 minutes

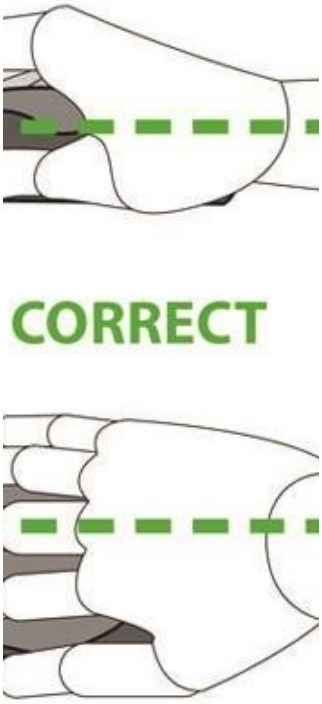
The assessment filters mice by your hand size, dominant hand and pain.

TAKE THE ASSESSMENT

GOOD VS BAD

Mouse setup

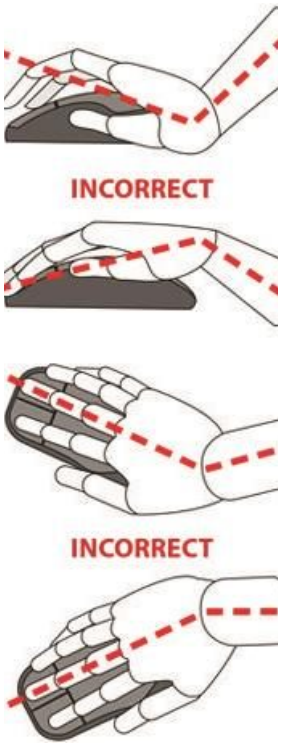




DO THIS

1. Move the mouse without moving your wrist
2. Mouse at elbow height and close to the keyboard
3. Wrist neutral and mouse sized right, so your grip stays relaxed





AVOID THIS

1. Moving the mouse with the wrist instead of the arm
2. Wrist bent up while mousing
3. Clawed, tense grip

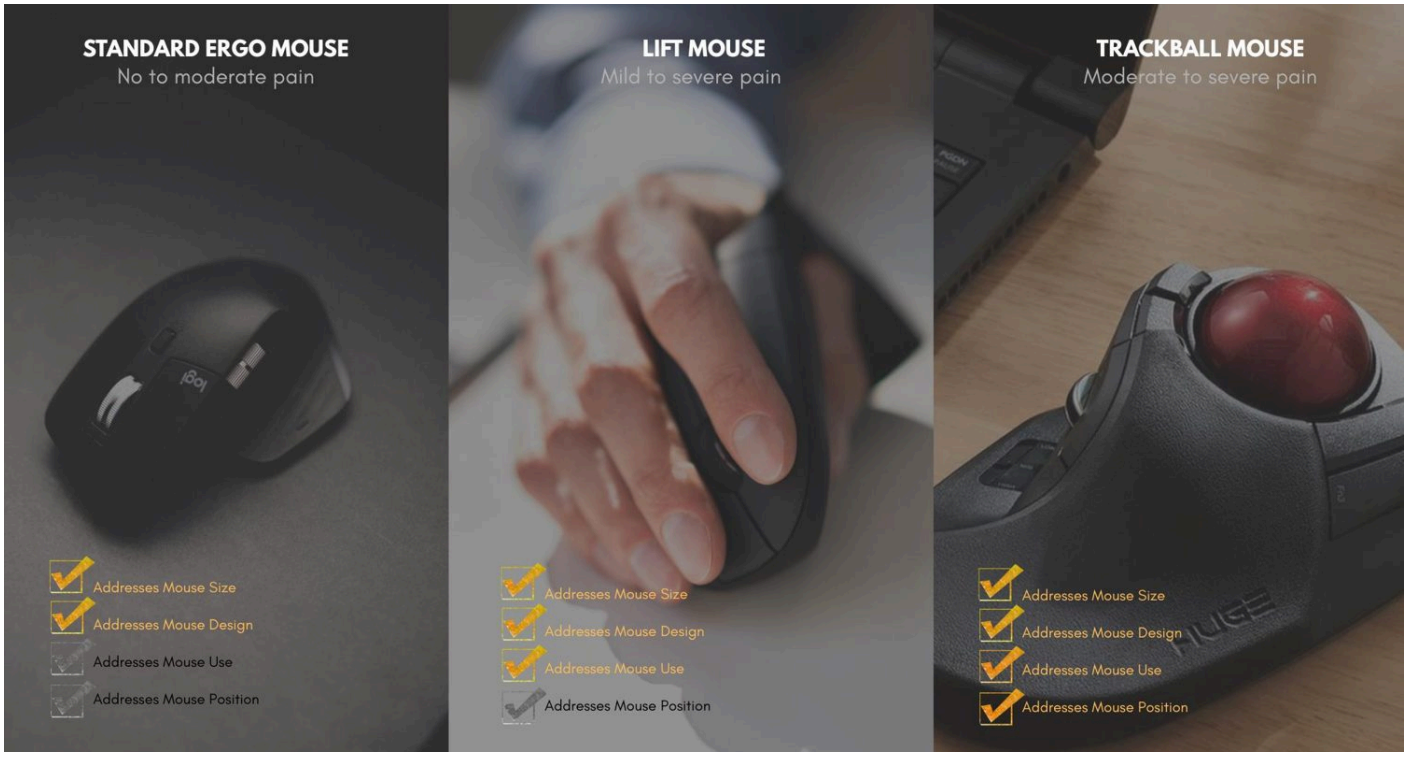
RANKED PICKS Ergonomic mice → Mouse pads →

GET MY PICKS — FREE ASSESSMENT

MOUSE · OPTIONS

Which mouse option is *best for you?*

Ergonomic mice form a ladder too. Start where your symptoms are; step up if they persist or worsen. Size and hand matter as much as style.



STEP 1

Standard ergonomic

For: Mild wrist symptoms, no elbow pain

Sculpted shape that fills the hand for a relaxed grip.

See picks →

STEP 2

Lift (vertical)

For: Wrist pain, with or without elbow pain

Handshake angle that removes forearm twist.

See picks →

STEP 3

Trackball

For: Frequent wrist and elbow pain, no thumb pain

The device stays still; fingers or thumb roll the ball.

See picks →

STEP 4

Roller

For: Severe, daily wrist pain

A bar in front of the keyboard moved by fingers and palm — no reach at all.

See picks →

FIND YOUR SIZE WITH A CREDIT CARD

Lay a card's long side from your wrist crease toward your middle fingertip. Under 2 cards: small. About 2: medium. Over 2¼: large.

Let the assessment choose for you

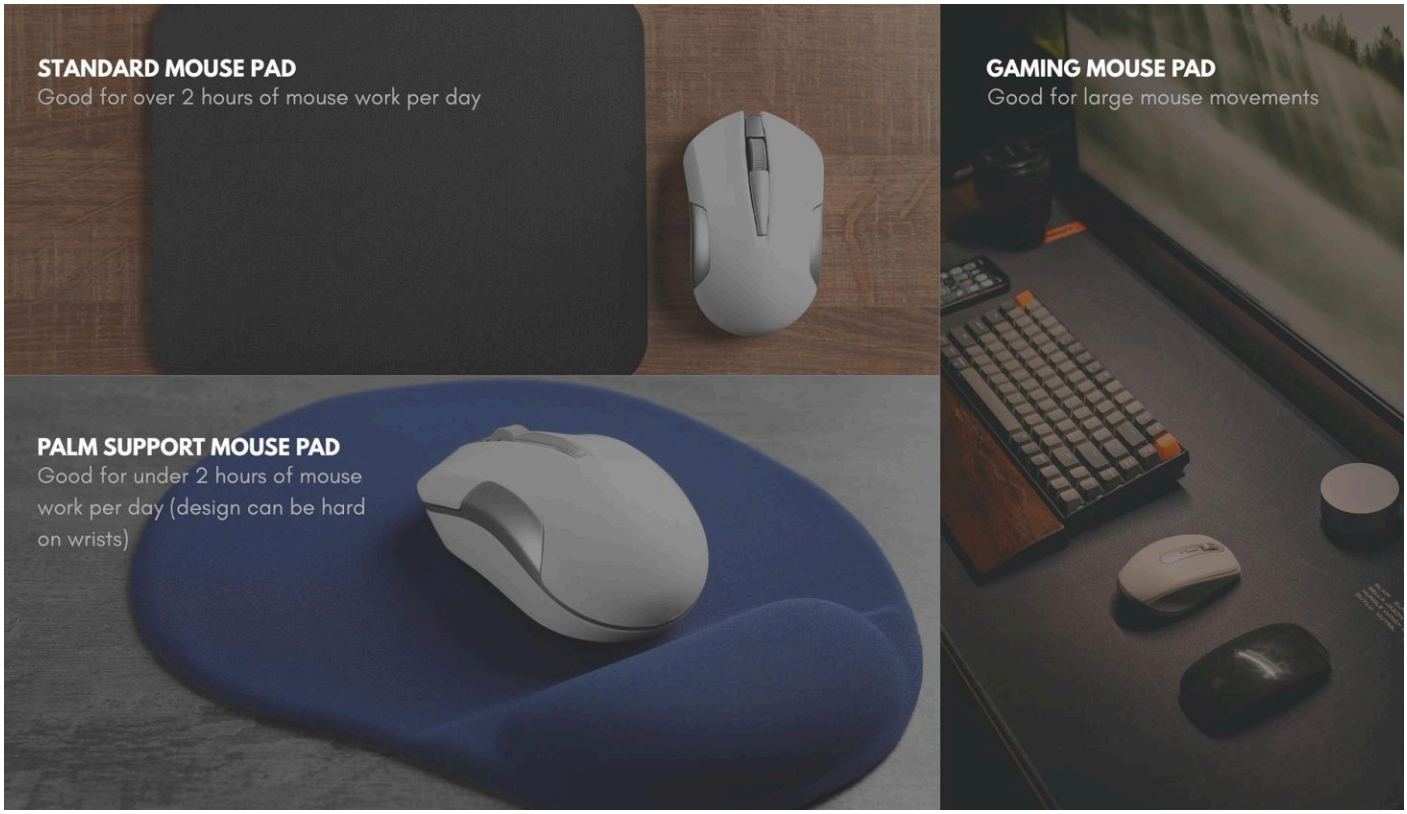
It reads your wrist, elbow and thumb pain plus hand size and dominant hand, then picks the top-ranked match.

TAKE THE ASSESSMENT

MOUSE · SURFACE

Mouse pad *options*

The right surface cuts the force it takes to move and stop the mouse, and keeps your wrist in place.



Standard pad

Good for most people at most desks. A smooth, consistent surface means less force to move the mouse.

See picks →

Palm support pad

Built-in cushion keeps the wrist from bending up. Useful when the wrist rests on the desk edge.

See picks →

Large (gaming) pad

Room for keyboard and mouse together, so you move from the elbow without running off the edge.

See picks →

WRIST OR HAND PAIN?

Pick a palm support pad or a separate palm support. Keep the wrist straight, never bent over the edge.

SPEED IT UP

Heavy mousers: raise cursor speed so small arm movements cross the screen. Less distance, less repetition.

MONITOR · THE STANDARD

The perfect *monitor* setup

Your monitor controls your head and neck posture all day. At the wrong height, distance or angle, your neck bends, tips back or twists to keep the screen in view — and the fatigue builds. Set right, your head stays balanced and your neck muscles relaxed.

KEY SETUP TIPS

Height: eyes level with the top 2–3″ of the screen

Distance: 20–30″ for one monitor, 35–40″ for several

Alignment: one screen centered on the spacebar; two split evenly

Use pattern: center most, right side next, left side least

Laptop users: always use a stand plus external keyboard and mouse

Multi-monitor: angle outer screens about 30°; consider vertical screens

Vision: without glasses and below 20/20? Raise display scale to 125%+ — PC | Mac

WHERE A POOR SETUP SHOWS UP

Neck: a screen too high or low keeps the neck tipped back or bent

Shoulders: forward head posture lifts and tenses the shoulders

Headaches & eyes: wrong distance, angle or settings make you squint

Back: a low screen pulls you into a slouch

SEE IT DONE RIGHT

Photo examples of a good and a bad monitor setup, point by point.

Good vs bad, pg. 20 →



EQUIPMENT WE RANKED

Monitor arms →

Monitor stands →

Webcams →

READ THE RESEARCH

What research says about desk neck pain →

Why do I get headaches from working at a computer? →

Check your monitor in 10 minutes

The assessment checks screen count, height and webcam position.

TAKE THE ASSESSMENT

GOOD VS BAD

One monitor



DO THIS

1. Top of the monitor at eye level
2. Monitor 20–30″ from your eyes
3. Sitting back in the chair while viewing

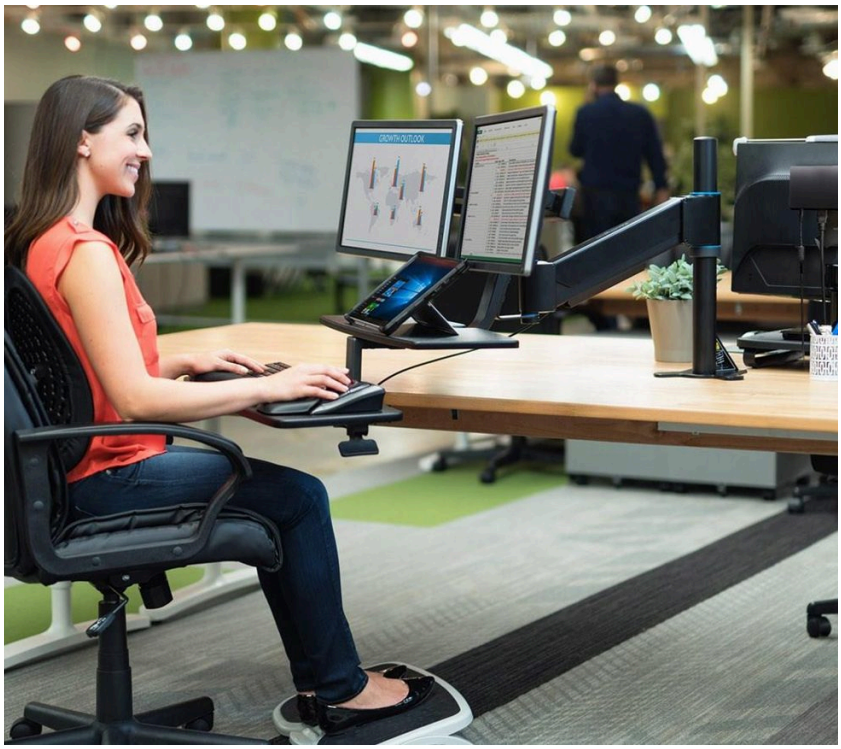


AVOID THIS

1. Eyes too close to the screen — eye strain and extra neck movement
2. Monitor too low, so you bend forward to read

GOOD VS BAD

Two monitors · *equal use*



DO THIS

1. Monitors 30″+ away
2. Screens big enough that you don't lean in
3. The seam between screens centered on your body
4. Tops at eye level on a stand or arms



AVOID THIS

1. Center of the two screens not aligned with your body — constant neck rotation
2. Monitors too close, forcing extra neck rotation

GOOD VS BAD

Two monitors · *unequal use*



DO THIS

1. Monitors 30″+ away with tops at eye level
2. Secondary monitor angled right beside the primary
3. Primary monitor centered on the spacebar and your body



AVOID THIS

1. Second monitor too low, putting your neck at an awkward angle
2. Primary monitor off-center, causing neck rotation

GOOD VS BAD

Three monitors







DO THIS

1. Center monitor centered on you
2. Monitors at eye level and as far back as the desk allows
3. Vertical outer screens reduce neck rotation

AVOID THIS

1. Tops not at eye level — neck and spine bend
2. Primary monitor slightly off-center
3. Monitors not pushed back, adding rotation

RANKED PICKS Monitor arms → Monitor stands →

GET MY PICKS — FREE ASSESSMENT

LIGHTING · THE STANDARD

The perfect *lighting* setup

Lighting shapes how you sit as much as how you see. Too dim and you lean in and squint. Too bright or glary and you tilt or hunch to dodge reflections. Either way your eyes work harder, and the neck and shoulders tense along with them.

KEY SETUP TIPS

Room light: 100–500 lux — measure with a light meter app: Android | iPhone

Task lighting: adjustable desk lamp for documents or keyboard visibility

Screen settings: brightness around 30–70%, plus contrast and text size for comfort

Blue light: protection for 2+ hours of daily screen use

Glare: place lights and screens to avoid reflections

Color temperature: warmer tones (3,000–4,000K) — PC | Mac

WHERE A POOR SETUP SHOWS UP

Headaches: too little or too much light adds eye strain and facial tension

Neck: leaning or tilting to see clearly

Eyes: dryness, blur and fatigue

Shoulders: hunching toward the screen or away from glare

Sleep: bright, blue-heavy light late in the day can disrupt sleep

SEE IT DONE RIGHT

Photo examples of a good and a bad lighting setup, point by point.

Good vs bad, pg. 25 →



EQUIPMENT WE RANKED

- Desk lamps →
- Blue light glasses →
- Smart bulbs →
- Blackout curtains →

READ THE RESEARCH

Top 5 reasons desk workers get headaches →

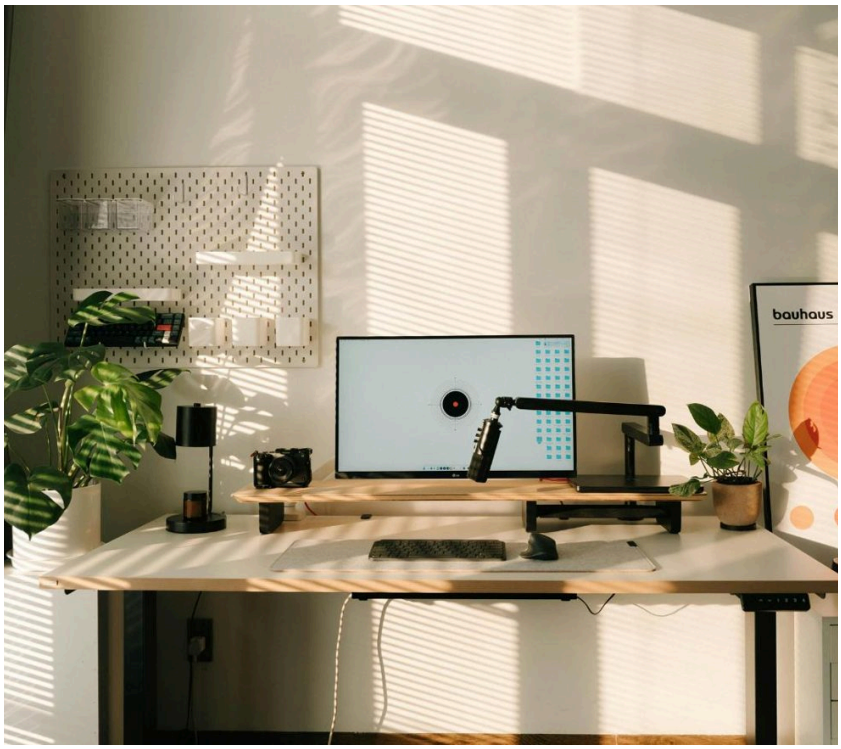
Check your lighting in 10 minutes

The assessment picks the right lighting fix for your room.

TAKE THE ASSESSMENT

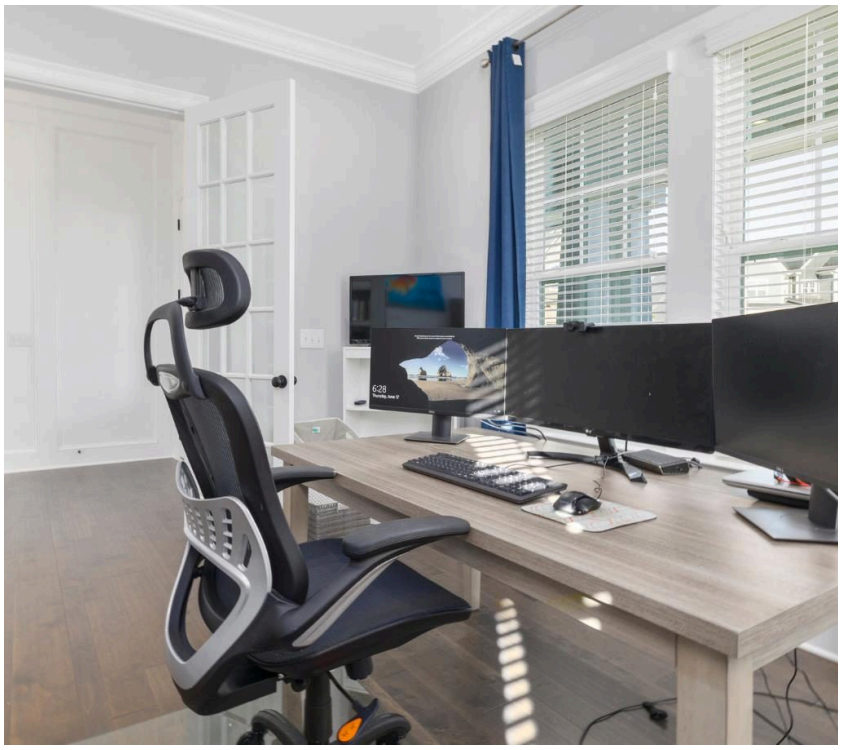
GOOD VS BAD

Lighting setup



DO THIS

1. Curtains and blinds to control daylight
2. Room light off or dimmed to stay within 100–500 lux
3. Desk perpendicular to the window to cut glare
4. A desk lamp to control light where you work



AVOID THIS

1. Bright room light stacked on screen light, far above 100–500 lux
2. Window light facing you with the blinds open

RANKED PICKS Desk lamps → Blackout curtains →

GET MY PICKS — FREE ASSESSMENT

DOCUMENT · THE STANDARD

The perfect *document* setup

Papers flat on the desk make you look down at them, then back up at the screen, hundreds of times a day. That constant nodding loads the neck and upper back. Raising documents to screen level takes most of that movement away.

KEY SETUP TIPS

Document stand: for anyone working with papers 2+ hours a day

Position: between screen and keyboard, or right beside the monitor

Distance: as close as comfortable to avoid reaching

Height: similar to the screen to cut head movement

Angle: tilted so you read without bending the neck

Workflow: digitize where you can to reduce paper

WHERE A POOR SETUP SHOWS UP

Neck: repeated bending to read flat documents

Shoulders: reaching across the desk for papers

Headaches: constant up-and-down head movement tenses the base of the skull

Eyes: refocusing between distances

Upper back: leaning over flat papers

SEE IT DONE RIGHT

Photo examples of a good and a bad document setup, point by point.

Good vs bad, pg. 27 →



EQUIPMENT WE RANKED

Document stands →

READ THE RESEARCH

Why does my neck hurt after sitting at a computer? →

How to fix tech neck →

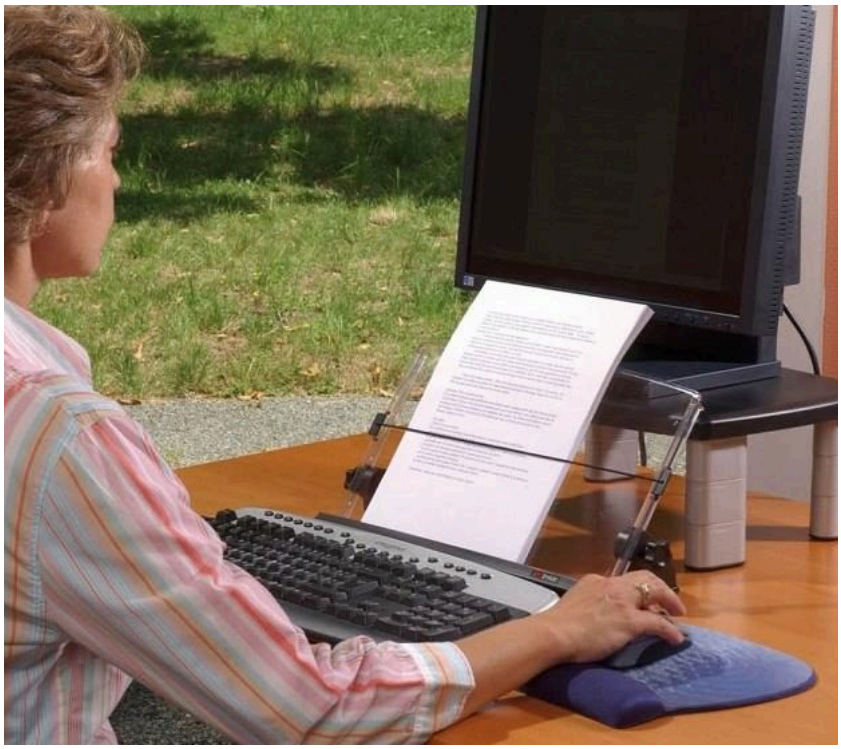
Check your document in 10 minutes

The assessment checks your paper and phone time and picks a stand or headset if needed.

TAKE THE ASSESSMENT

GOOD VS BAD

Document setup



DO THIS

1. Document stand lifts paperwork so you read it with minimal neck movement



AVOID THIS

1. Documents flat on the desk — awkward lifting and constant neck bending

RANKED PICKS Document stands →

GET MY PICKS — FREE ASSESSMENT

PHONE · THE STANDARD

The perfect *phone* setup

The classic phone mistake is cradling it between ear and shoulder to free your hands. That holds the neck bent to one side and one shoulder hiked up for the whole call. A headset and a well-placed phone end it.

KEY SETUP TIPS

Height: phone at desk level — no reaching up or down

Proximity: as close as possible if you use it 2+ hours a day

Headset: essential for 2+ hours of calls a day

Hand position: phone on your non-writing side so you never cradle it to take notes

Workflow: review your call process once a year

Technology: computer-integrated calling cuts handset use

WHERE A POOR SETUP SHOWS UP

Neck: cradling bends and twists the neck to one side

Shoulders: one shoulder held up through the call

Headaches: sustained neck tension at the base of the skull

Arm tingling: long cradling can irritate nerves running into the arm — see a clinician if it persists

SEE IT DONE RIGHT

Photo examples of a good and a bad phone setup, point by point.

Good vs bad, pg. 29 →



EQUIPMENT WE RANKED

Headsets →

READ THE RESEARCH

What research says about desk neck pain →

Check your phone in 10 minutes

The assessment checks your phone time and recommends a headset if you need one.

TAKE THE ASSESSMENT

GOOD VS BAD

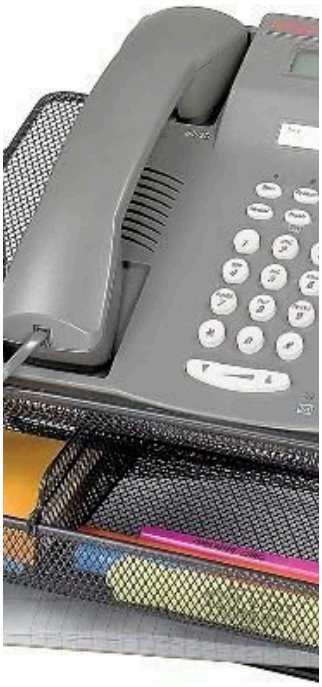
Phone setup



DO THIS

1. Headset cuts handset use and awkward neck postures
2. Phone flat on the desk, close to your chair





AVOID THIS

1. No headset, so you cradle the phone with your neck
2. Phone stands like this force extra shoulder reaching