

Ergonomics at Middlebury College

The reality of the modern workplace makes ergonomics more than simply a science – it's an economic necessity for workers and employers alike. The computer allows us to accomplish incredible amounts of work in less time. It also requires that we spend hours sitting in one position, using repetitive motions at the keyboard, often slouching, straining our necks, or squinting at the monitor.

According to the US Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) result when there is a mismatch between the physical capacity of workers and the physical demands of their jobs. Every year, employers report nearly 600,000 MSDs serious enough to force workers to take time off work to recover. In fact, one-third of all lost workdays are caused by MSDs such as carpal tunnel syndrome, tendonitis, and back injuries.

Ergonomics studies people and their working environments in order to create tools, equipment, and work methods which make it physically easier to perform better. Good ergonomics emphasizes comfort, safety, and economy of effort. Furniture and equipment are adjustable to fit individual body shapes. Awkward postures, pressure points, repetitive motions, and unnecessary movements are minimized.

Studies show that good ergonomics can allow office workers to increase their efficiency by up to 25 percent, as they work smarter and more comfortably instead of harder or faster. According to OSHA statistics, \$1 of every \$3 in worker's compensation goes toward MSDs that could be reduced or prevented by good ergonomics. Preventing just one worker from developing a MSD can save an employer more than \$27,000 in direct costs.

The Human Resources Office established an ergonomics program designed to educate Middlebury College faculty and staff about health and safety concerns in the workplace with an emphasis toward preventative care and wellness. The program provides ergonomic assessments of office workstations to employees and will advise departments regarding the purchase of replacement furniture and supplies.

What is Ergonomics? The Oxford Dictionary and English Usage Guide defines ergonomics as "the study of the relationship between people and their working environment."

The goal of a sound ergonomics program is to fit the job to the worker rather than fitting the worker to the job. In doing so, it is important to keep in mind that people come in different sizes and shapes and possess different physical capabilities. Therefore, the more adaptable the workstation is- whether it be an adjustable computer table for the office worker or an adjustable height stand for the assembly line worker- the less the likelihood of injury/fatigue. In the process, the morale and productivity level of the employee is also increased.

Policy Statement

The ergonomics program at Middlebury College is specifically designed to encourage all employees to take responsibility for their own health and safety in the workplace by offering resources and learning tools for everyone to use in advance of the onset of illness or injury.

Organization and Responsibility

The College has developed an Ergonomics Program to help address situations that could lead to adverse health effects and to facilitate access to corrective measures. The Human Resources Office provides oversight of this effort. The Ergonomics Program, at a minimum shall:

- Promote the Ergonomics Policy and revise the policy as necessary to meet future needs and regulatory changes.
- Serve as a resource to departments requiring assistance in evaluating ergonomics issues.
- Serve as a liaison to resolve ergonomics issues.
- Provide workstation evaluations.
- Train employees and supervisors in ergonomic concepts, proper work break patterns and exercises.

Managers

Each supervisor/manager is ultimately responsible for providing a safe and reasonable work environment for their employees.

Staff

It is the individual's responsibility to follow recognized practices and policies as provided by the supervisor/manager through cooperative efforts of the Ergonomics Program, Human Resources and the EH&S Office. It is critical to bring to your supervisor/manager's attention any potential ergonomic problems associated with your work area.

Purchasing

The Purchasing Department will work with the Ergonomics Program Coordinator on the evaluation, selection, and purchase, when necessary, of ergonomically correct furniture and hand tools.

For items totaling less than \$100 per evaluation, the employee's department will pay for the items. Items totaling more than \$100 per evaluation will be paid through the ergonomics budget. (see chart).

Physical Plant

Facilities Management will work with the Ergonomics Program Coordinator on the selection of ergonomically correct furniture and workstation design.

Medical Professionals

Medical professionals will conduct medical evaluations on employees who may suffer from injuries and illnesses that may have been caused by poor workstation design or poor work habits at the workstation. They will work with Human Resources and provide necessary medical documentation.

Training/Education

The Ergonomics Program Coordinator can provide group educational discussions and one-on-one individual sessions at the request of an individual/department.