

A Guide to  
*Seating*

Physiotherapy Service

## ■ Why worry about seating ?

Many people spend a large amount of time sitting down. This may be at work, when relaxing at home, or when driving.

Sitting for long periods of time can lead to some discomfort in the spine. It may be possible to reduce this discomfort by adopting some of the tips in this booklet.

Maintaining a good position whilst sitting can reduce stresses on your spine but it is also important to move regularly. A good position involves maintaining the natural curves of the spine.

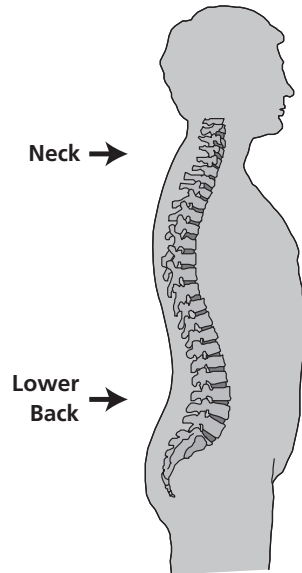
## ■ Maintain a healthy spine when sitting

- A “lumbar roll”, or rolled up towel, can be used to support the curve in the lower back.

This will help to maintain the neck and back in a good position.

- When sitting for a long time e.g. two hours, it is important to alter your position to help reduce stiffness in your spine, you can do this by standing up and walking around every half an hour. If you have back pain you may benefit from performing the mobilising exercises taught to you by the physiotherapist.

If you have neck pain, you may benefit from performing chin tucks and mobilising exercises every half an hour, as taught by your physiotherapist.

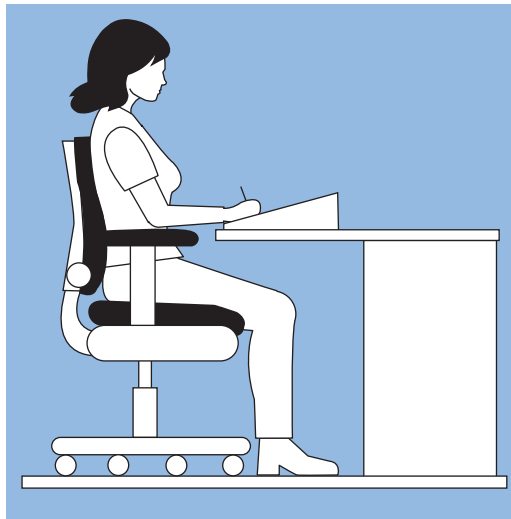


## ■ Seating at work

A full time office worker can spend anything from 25-40 hours a week in a sitting position. This is in addition to time spent watching T.V., driving or sitting on a bus.

Chairs or seats should allow you to sit correctly giving full support throughout the day. A well designed chair can be expensive, but you can quickly improve your sitting position in any chair by considering the following;

- Maintain a comfortable position as much as possible trying not to slouch and ensure your back has as much support as you feel comfortable with at belt level.
- Adjust the height of the seat so your feet are flat on the floor or footrest.
- Ensure your thighs are well supported without pressure behind the knee. A curved edge on the front of the seat can prevent this.
- Adjust the seat height so that the hip joint is higher than the knee joint i.e. the base of the seat tilts forward slightly.

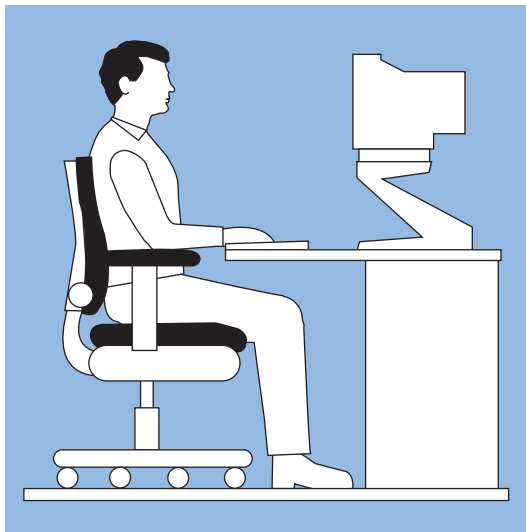


- Sit with your bottom at the back of the chair to maintain full lower back support (do not perch at the front of the chair).

## ■ Using a visual display unit / computer

- The screen should be at horizontal eye level.
- Change the height of the keyboard to ensure your elbows are not bent more than 90°. When your fingers are placed on the middle row of the keyboard they should be level with your elbows, i.e. your forearms should be horizontal.
- Arm rests should fit under the desk and not interfere with work tasks.
- Reaching can twist and bend your back awkwardly. Arrange your office furniture in an “L” shape and use a chair with wheels. Try a reading stand for documents to avoid turning your neck awkwardly. If 40% or more of your time is spent on the phone then use a headset.

**Remember** - Everybody is different and what is comfortable for one is not for another. Always adjust the chair to suit **you** and your task. Make the most of natural breaks in your job to change position, stand up and move around.

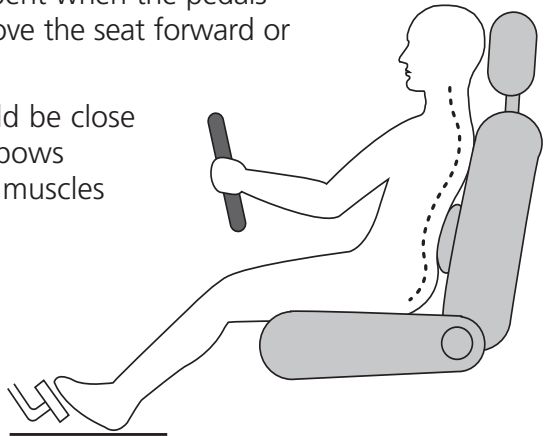


## ■ Seating in the car

Your driving position is important whether the length of your journey is 5 minutes or 5 hours. To enable you to maintain a good, but relaxed sitting position, make sure you adjust the seat and controls to suit **you**.

### The Car

- The seat should only be reclined slightly from the upright position and a supportive high backrest is advised.
- The seat should be adjusted so that primary controls can be used without having to compromise support of the spine.
- Get into a good posture before positioning the mirrors.
- Knees should be slightly bent when the pedals are fully depressed, so move the seat forward or back to achieve this.
- The steering wheel should be close to the body with your elbows bent to reduce stress on muscles and joints.



### The Driver / Passenger

- If the car has an adjustable lumbar support then use it. If there is no lumbar support, then you may find it helpful to use a lumbar roll (see diagram).
- When you stop at the traffic lights check your position. Do not slouch, keep your chin tucked in and your shoulders back.
- Take regular breaks so you can stand, walk around, and therefore reduce stiffness. It is recommended that a break of at least 15 minutes is taken every 2 hours.
- Take care when lifting heavy items from the boot. Try to maintain a good spinal position and use the muscles in the hips to lift items. Try to keep your bodyweight through your heels rather than your toes.

## ■ Seating at home

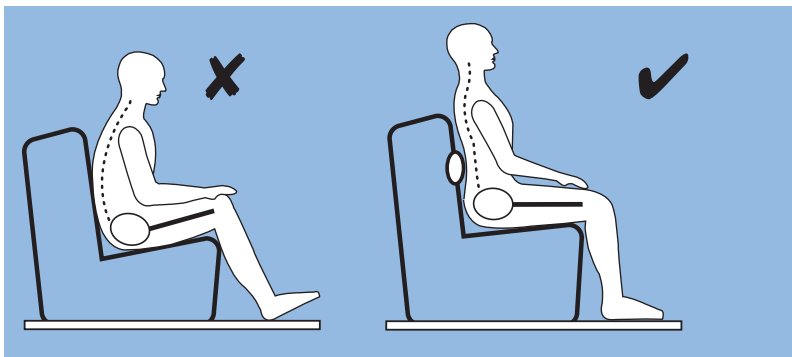
We spend a significant amount of time, (up to 4-5 hours a day), relaxing in comfortable seating, usually at the end of the day when our muscles feel tired.

### Things to consider when choosing seating for your home.

- If your seat is too deep, this will tend to cause you to slump, this can contribute towards back pain.
- Similarly if the seat is too low, or if it slopes down at the back, this may also cause you to slump.
- Ideally the foam should be firmer at the rear, many settees have softer foam in this area, giving you insufficient support.

### Things you can do to improve existing seating at home

- Using extra cushions, adjust existing seat height and depth to fit **YOU**.
- Firmer cushions could give you extra support you may need.
- The seat angle can be adjusted by altering cushions, to achieve the ideal 90°-100° angle between your back and legs.
- You may find it helpful to use a “lumbar roll” to maintain the natural curve in the small of your back.
- Try not to sit in the same position for hours at a time, get up, stretch and walk around for a couple of minutes every half an hour.



## ■ References and resources

- 1) <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ck1.pdf> - seating advice leaflet from the HSE to help set up your workstation.
- 2) <http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/back-pain-at-work/>
- 3) Dankaerts W et al (2006) Differences in sitting postures are associated with non specific low back pain disorders when patients are sub classified. Spine 31 (6) 698-704.
- 4) Ferrriera PH et al (2006) Specific stabilisation exercises for spinal and pelvic pain: A systematic review Australian Journal of Physiotherapy 52 (2) 79-88.

## ■ Further Information

If you have any queries about this guide to seating and are still currently on active treatment please discuss with your physiotherapist.

If you have been discharged from physiotherapy please discuss any queries with your general practitioner.

- NHS Direct: 111
- **Smoking:** Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is a smoke-free organisation. You are not permitted to smoke or use e-cigarettes in any of the hospital buildings or grounds.

If you need this information in another format or language, please ask a member of staff to arrange this for you.

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