

# Preventing Chronic Low Back Pain

## Computer Habits for Healthy Backs

Computers are everywhere. According to the US Department of Education nearly every public school in the country has computers with Internet access. Most children and adolescents use computers regularly, ranging from 80 percent of kindergartners to 97 percent of students in grades 9–12. Computer use may place your child at risk for back pain and other health problems. Here are some tips that may help.

### Learn how to set up your workstation

The correct set-up may be the difference between a healthy back and chronic low back pain. Who will use your home computer the most? Start with this person:

1. Set-up for a neutral posture: This means moving the monitor, desk, chair, keyboard, and mouse into a position that fits the person. This isn't hard but will take some time.
2. Keep it close: Avoid reaching for the mouse, keyboard or other items that are either too high or too far away.
3. Mood lighting: Avoid bright lights and glare on the monitor. Use a freestanding light on the desk to make sure there is bright light for any papers you may be working with.

### Make the workstation fit your family



Now that you have set up the workstation for one person, figure out how to adjust for the rest of the family. Ideally everyone using the computer will have a neutral posture. If you don't have an adjustable chair, try a cushion or footrest (a sturdy box will work) to create a neutral posture for

shorter family members. Keep the adjustments simple so that the whole family can stick to it.

### Watch out for bad posture

It is so easy to slouch, lean to one side, or not take the time to adjust the workstation. Don't ignore bad posture.



### Take breaks and exercise

Take breaks every 30 minutes. Get up, stretch, and focus your eyes away from the computer. Setting a timer may help. Set aside technology-free time – a break every 30 minutes doesn't replace the need for regular exercise.

### Buy adjustable

It will be a lot easier to make your workstation fit your family if you can adjust the height of your chair and monitor. Teach your kids how to safely adjust this equipment if they are old enough and encourage them to adjust the workstation to fit them every time they use the computer.

### Laptops

Laptops (and other small computers) can be really hard on your body because it is difficult to position the monitor and keyboard to keep a neutral posture. People also tend to use laptops in odd positions: lying on a bed, curled up on a couch, etc. Try placing the keyboard at a comfortable distance and enlarging the font so that you are not straining your eyes.

### Get more information

Don't trust every website. Many websites are trying to sell you something. Most of this information came from Cornell University. They have a lot of trustworthy and detailed information about setting up workstations correctly for you and your family: <http://ergo.human.cornell.edu>