

Ergonomics

A common definition of ergonomics is fitting the job to the person, not forcing the person to fit the job. The impact of ergonomics is seen all around us. Common ergonomic sights that we see in our environment include:

Adjustable Chairs

A dentist or barber's chair positions the client to make them more comfortable while they work. Office chairs adjust in multiple ways to position the user to comfortably work at their workstation.

Hydraulic or Electric Lift Tables

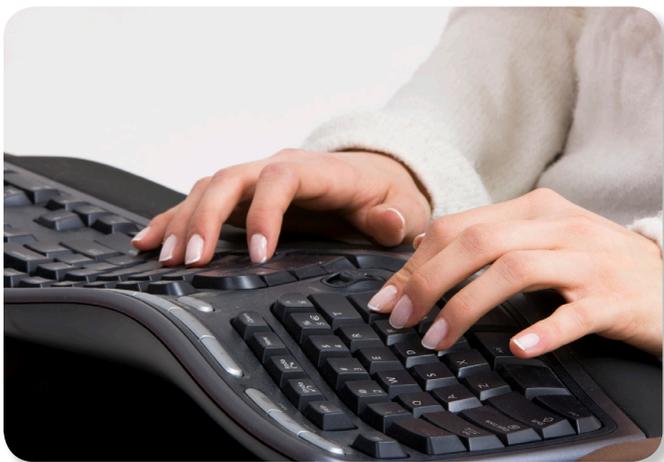
Lift tables that raise or lower at the touch of a button so that the person does not have to lift or lower boxes or parts.

Air Guns/Pneumatic Tools

Air provides the power rather than the person.

Drafting Tables

The tables tilt the work towards the person rather than making the person lean over the table.



Ergonomics Serves Three Functions:

- **Increases efficiency.** If something is physically easier on the person, the person is generally more efficient. Automatic systems for moving materials minimizes employee handling and can speed up production while reducing the physical demands on the body.
- **Reduce the physical demand of the task.** The more an employee handles an object—particularly lifting or lowering it, the greater the risk of injury. If a job is physically easier to do, the risk is less. Ergonomic adjustments that reduce the demands of a task include adjustable worktables that allow work to be done at an appropriate height, and overhead hoists that assist in moving heavy objects.
- **Increased clarity.** Increased clarity means that the tasks are designed so they are easier to understand. This means the task should be less confusing and more error-free. A perfect example is the design of light switches. People assume that moving the switch up turns the light on and down is off. But what if the switches are mounted sideways? It creates confusion and the task becomes more difficult and creates more opportunity for errors. This is no big deal if a person accidentally turns the lights on or off, but what if they work in a nuclear reactor and push a switch the wrong way? The result may be far more serious.

ERGONOMICS

Talking Notes

POINTS TO REVIEW

1. An ergonomic tool makes a task physically easier to do.

Ergonomics is a way of making things easier on the body by making a machine or tool do most of the work rather than the person. Something as simple as a cart or saw horse is an ergonomic tool that minimizes the demands on the body.

2. Many ergonomic solutions come from creative problem solving rather than expensive equipment.

Ergonomic solutions in the workplace need not require high priced or fancy changes. For example, it is known that the lift most associated with the risk of back injury is the lift that begins or ends at ground level. A simple inexpensive solution would be to put objects on stacked pallets to eliminate the need to lift from the ground.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1. Other than reducing the physical demands on the body, how can an ergonomic solution help?**
- 2. What are some simple ergonomic solutions that can be implemented at work? At home?**
- 3. What are some common, everyday ergonomic solutions we see in our daily lives?**
- 4. What are some ergonomic solutions currently in place at your company?**

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