

5 Secret Insights for Solving Office Chair Aches, Pains and Discomfort

Discover how these missing or defective features on your office chair can seriously compromise work comfort and productivity

By

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“a chair must allow users to shift dynamically between a range of stable postures”

Dr Tim Springer for Knoll Inc.

When your office chair doesn't have the right functions you find yourself suffering all manner of aches, pains and discomfort.

Do any of the following symptoms worry you?

Your thighs are aching and you have been sitting for barely an hour, particularly the undersides - maybe even some numbness.

No matter what way you sit you can't find comfort and your buttocks are really uncomfortable, continually shuffling around provides temporary relief, yet it never lasts for long and you soon seem to be back where you started.

Your lower back appears to be in constant pain and you attempt to relieve this by changing position in your chair, the trouble is any relief is temporary and the nagging aches soon return.

Your shoulders and neck are often stiff, rigid even and the lack of movement brings on pain because the muscles supporting these parts of your body are stressed and tired. And this tends to happen almost daily as you work, especially on a tight deadline.

Arms and wrists flag very quickly especially when using a mouse intensively, you are concerned you may end up with RSI (repetitive stress injury) or carpal tunnel problems if it isn't sorted out soon.

All of the above conditions are all too common for people working with computers regularly and many will put them down to tiredness, stress and pressure of work, which are actually the symptoms of the problems.

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“ Is your office chair causing you a loss of comfort only you just didn’t realize it?”

What you are sitting on whilst working is highly likely the chief suspect, something which often never crosses sufferer's minds many of whom never give their office chair a second thought.

By now you are probably wondering how your office chair may be causing some or all of these problems and more importantly what steps you will need to take to minimize these aggravating and debilitating problems.

So let's begin, it's time to look at the 5 secret insights for tackling these issues head on.

Secret # 1 Seat Depth Adjustment Is Critical For Good Leg Comfort

“Adjustable seat depth is critical for leg comfort in an office chair”

Do your legs become uncomfortable in your office chair? Are you finding the underside and or tops of your thighs often ache once you have been sitting for a little while. Are your buttocks frequently uncomfortable too?

Maybe you find you are fidgeting about in your chair because you can't find a comfortable position to place your legs. You may even suffer with some numbness in your thighs and bottom too.

Cause and Solution

People suffering these symptoms frequently do so as a consequence of their chair's inability to cater for their leg length.

The vast majority of office swivel chairs, even some quite expensive ones have no means of adjusting to suit the user's leg length. Considering HÅG first introduced a chair with this feature as long ago as 1975 it's little short of scandalous it is missing from most chairs some 34 years later. Apologies for the rant only it matters - a lot!

Seat depth adjustment is a vital requirement for anyone spending any amount of time in an office chair. It allows the seat pad to move in or out adjusting to the perfect setting for your needs. When properly set up your legs should overhang the seat's front edge by 3 inches or so.

People's leg length varies enormously, look round any office and observe shorter people perched on the edge of their chair because the seat is far too deep for them. Tall people have the opposite problem they are sitting with their backs pressed hard into their chair back and yet their legs are still overhanging the seat by 6 inches or more.

Correct seat depth adjustment is highly important for good leg comfort and you should always include this function on any office chair you use regularly.

Secret # 2: Your chair back must adjust properly supporting your back and spine

Are you suffering a lot of lower back pain sitting in your office chair?
Are you finding your chair's back can't seem to give you comfortable support?
Are you having difficulty or finding it's just not possible to adjust the back to where you need it to be?

Cause and Solution

“A poorly designed chair back can result in a lot of back pain problems”

If this sounds like you, your chair's back is the likely culprit, by not adjusting correctly to your back it allows you to sit with a rounded lower back. And this soon causes pain in your back muscles as they struggle to cope with the pressure they are under resulting in them sending you an internal memo called pain.

The commonest cause of this type of pain occurs with a fixed chair back which doesn't adjust and isn't aligned with your back or a poorly adjusted or designed chair back.

Any chair having a low or medium height back needs to be adjustable and probably include a little shaping in the back foam to enhance support. With that said avoid chairs with highly sculpted chair backs as invariably they don't match the shape of your back well and are just as likely to cause you more discomfort as a result.

When you sit in top range chairs they will often have backs that aren't height adjustable because they tackle lower back support and pain in a different way.

To start with the backs are mostly full height and so will usually properly support your back well as they frequently have a built in adjustable lumbar support which is designed to take care of lower back support correctly.

Others build in lumbar support as part of the overall chair design in such a way they shape to your back dynamically giving good support.

Secret #3: Adjustable arms spread the load on your spine and support arms, shoulders and neck

“Fixed or incorrectly adjusted chair arms can result in all sorts of sitting discomfort”

Are you getting a lot of shoulder pain?

Is your neck often feeling stiff and lacking mobility?

Are you finding your arms and wrists tire easily and ache, particularly when using your mouse a lot?

Cause and Solution

These sorts of symptoms are often the result of poor arm support whilst working at your computer. Many chairs still come with fixed arms and it just isn't practical to set them at a universal height which will suit everyone.

As well as this they often have an exaggerated curved shape, maybe because the designer thought it looks cool - reality check are our lower arms really shaped like bananas?

Tests show properly supporting your arms can relieve as much as 20% of the overall pressure on your spine while sitting. This isn't perhaps too surprising as your arms, shoulders and head when unsupported act as a considerable dead weight and so put your body under strain.

This problem is best answered by having height adjustable arms and setting them up so they give natural support for your arms, shoulders, neck and head.

When correctly set up your chair's arms should provide good support for your arms such that your shoulders aren't straining downwards, or resting in an unnatural upward position like you were shrugging your shoulders.

Some chairs come with additional arm adjustments like armrest angle and forward and backward adjustability. These features can be useful additions, however the most important adjustment is in setting up the height of your chair arms.

Secret # 4: Working in an incorrectly height adjusted or fixed chair is bad news for your posture

“Incorrect seat height for the user’s body size means a lack of comfort results”

The effects on your body from working at the wrong height are often similar to those experienced with incorrect seat depth.

Are your legs getting uncomfortable in your office chair, feeling heavy or dead?
Are you feeling pain in your thighs on the underside or top, numbness maybe?
Are your buttocks often uncomfortable too?

Causes and Solution

Many of these problems result from incorrect seat height adjustment. Clearly it's fair to say the vast majority of swivel office chairs are height adjustable, it may well be the height adjustment range simply isn't right for you.

The most commonly affected chair users are either short built or very tall built people. When correctly adjusted your feet should be firmly on the floor and your thighs should be at an open angle a little bit beyond 90°.

The simple way to check whether a seat's height adjustment is right for you is to measure from the floor to the inside of your knee joint without shoes on. Then check the chair will adjust a little up or down from this measurement.

Many better quality chair manufacturers offer alternative sizes of gas lift to enable users who find the standard pneumatic lift isn't suitable for them to gain the correct seat height setting for their needs.

One final point of caution it's not a good idea to work at a computer or desk in a fixed height chair like a dining chair. Apart from height issues it will also restrict your body movement and can cause other pain and discomfort problems.

Secret # 5: Missing or incorrectly set chair tension to match your weight often causes discomfort

“Are you letting your office chair force the way you recline in it?”

Finding it requires a great effort to move your chair back when you want to recline? I'm guessing you are lightly built.

Seem like your chair loses all control when you want to recline in your chair, offering little or no resistance and suddenly lurching backwards? Chances are you are well built.

Causes and Solution

Both of these problems are caused by the same missing or incorrectly adjusted function on your office chair, here's what's happening.

Where your chair omits this function what you end up with is the manufacturer's best guess at what the back pressure should be set to, not very satisfactory. Quite simply they set the tension to a non adjustable pressure likely to make the chair usable by the most users.

There is simply no way of changing this you've got what you've got and the only solution is to replace the chair.

You might be lucky and find you have this adjustment on your chair, it could just be poorly setup. How can you tell? Take a look underneath the chair and see if there is round cylindrical knob fitted centrally to the front underside of the chair.

Usually turning the knob clockwise will increase the back pressure resistance, so if your chair has been throwing you all over the place this is the adjustment you should make.

Turning it anti-clockwise will normally reduce the back pressure and so if you have been fighting your chair when reclining this is the direction you need to turn the knob.

Secret # 5: Missing or incorrectly set chair tension to match your weight often causes discomfort

“Insisting on the correct tilt tension on your chair will make working a lot more enjoyable”

Begin by turning the knob gradually and keep trying the chair until you get it set right, you'll know when you have things set correctly because it will be pretty easy to recline safely.

This type of tension adjustment has been around for many years as is commonly referred to as knee tilt or synchro, it has some drawbacks but it's a lot better than having a chair without tension control.

A number of the major manufacturers of top quality office seating have moved on from this type of mechanism and introduced more sophisticated and innovative methods of tension adjustment.

There has been a move by some to introduce chair mechanisms which automatically adjust to the sitter's body weight thus taking the guesswork out of setting up the chair's tension setting.

It's important to make sure any office chair you consider buying includes some form of tension control to allow you to recline in comfort and remain in control of your chair.

Summary of The 5 Secrets For Solving Office Chair Problems

**“How well does
your office chair
match up to these 5
critical functions?”**

Here's a quick resume of the 5 key functions you must insist on having on any office chair.

Seat Depth Adjustment - It's Critical For Good Leg Comfort

Chairs back must adjust to correctly support your back and spine

Height adjustable arms spread the load and support your arms, shoulders and neck

Correctly adjusted seat height - working at the wrong height is bad news for your posture

Chair tilt tension that doesn't match your weight often causes needless frustration and discomfort.

What Next?

Want to find out how to select the perfect office chair? Be sure to visit www.officechairadvice.com/report.html and sign up for my report.

And if you would like personal advice and help with any office seating issue or chair selection please visit www.officechairadvice.com/consult.html for further information.