# How to Sit Properly in an Office Chair, Setup Checklist for Home and Office




**Introduction**

To sit properly in an office chair, keep your **feet flat** on the floor, your **knees about level with your hips**, your **lower back supported** by the backrest, your **forearms roughly parallel** to the floor, and the **top of your screen at or slightly below eye level**. These positions keep your joints in what OSHA calls a neutral body posture, where strain on the spine, neck and shoulders stays low.

Most desk discomfort does not come from one big mistake. It builds from small ones, such as a chair that is too low, a laptop that pulls your head forward, or hours spent without changing position. This guide checks your setup from the floor up, so you can review each part in a few minutes, whether you work in an office or at a kitchen table.

No single posture fits everyone, and even a good position becomes tiring when you hold it for hours. That is why this guide also covers **how often to move**, not only how to sit.

## Quick Answer, the 30-Second Sitting Checklist

Use this table as a fast self-check. If a row does not match how you sit right now, start your adjustments there.

| Body part | Good position | Common mistake |
|---|---|---|
| **Feet** | Flat on the floor or on a footrest | Dangling, or tucked under the chair |
| **Knees and hips** | Knees about level with hips, with a small gap (about two fingers) between the seat edge and the back of your knees | Knees much higher than hips, or the seat edge pressing behind the knees |
| **Lower back** | Hips pushed back in the seat, lower back supported by the backrest | Sitting on the front edge with the back unsupported |
| **Torso** | Upright to slightly reclined | Slouching forward or leaning to one side |
| **Arms and wrists** | Elbows close to the body, forearms and wrists straight and roughly parallel to the floor | Reaching forward, wrists bent up or down |
| **Shoulders** | Relaxed, not raised | Hunched toward the ears |
| **Screen and neck** | Top of the screen at or slightly below eye level, head over the shoulders | Looking down at a laptop with the chin pushed forward |
| **Movement** | Change position often and stand up regularly | Staying in one position for hours |

The sections below explain each row, starting with seat height and foot position.

## Start With Seat Height and Your Feet

**The right seat height puts your feet flat on the floor with your knees about level with your hips.** Everything else in your setup depends on this, so adjust it first, before you touch the backrest, armrests or screen.

Sit all the way back in the chair and use the height lever until both feet rest fully on the floor. Your thighs should be close to parallel with the floor, which is the position Mayo Clinic recommends for chair height. You should also be able to slide about two fingers between the front edge of the seat and the back of your knees, so the seat does not press on the sensitive area behind them.

Two common situations need a small fix:

- **Your feet do not reach the floor.** Use a footrest, or a sturdy stool or box, so your thighs stay supported and your legs do not dangle.
- **Your chair feels too low or keeps sinking.** Check the height lever first, then see our guide on how to raise your office chair height without replacing the gas lift for the causes and fixes.

If the chair has to sit high to suit your desk, the footrest is not optional. It keeps your pelvis level and takes pressure off the back of your thighs.

## Sit Back and Support Your Lower Back

**Sit with your hips pushed back in the seat and your lower back resting against the backrest.** A backrest only helps if your back is actually touching it, so sitting on the front edge of the seat cancels most of what the chair was designed to do.

Aim for an **upright or slightly reclined** position. OSHA describes a neutral seated posture in which the back is fully supported, with lumbar support when you sit vertical or lean back slightly, and a reclined posture means leaning back between 105 and 120 degrees from your thighs. You do not need to hold yourself rigidly straight. A relaxed, supported back is easier to maintain for hours than a stiff one.

Your lower back has a natural inward curve, and the backrest should fill that curve. If your chair has no lumbar support, or the support sits too high or too low, you can add a **small lumbar roll or a rolled towel** at the curve of your lower back. A lumbar support works behind you, while a seat cushion works under you, and they solve different problems. If you are wondering whether a cushion is worth adding, our guide on whether posture cushions really work explains what a cushion can and cannot change.

Do not treat any single position as the final answer. Small changes, such as adjusting the backrest angle or shifting your weight, keep your muscles from locking into one pattern during a long day.

## Position Your Arms, Wrists and Desk

**Your elbows should stay close to your body, bent between about 90 and 120 degrees, with your forearms and wrists straight and roughly parallel to the floor.** OSHA lists this as part of a neutral working posture, and it is what keeps your shoulders from creeping up toward your ears.

To get there, check these points in order:

- **Armrests.** If your chair has them, set them so your arms rest gently on them with your elbows close and your shoulders relaxed. Armrests that are too high push your shoulders up, and armrests that are too low make you lean to one side.
- **Desk height.** The desk surface should sit at about elbow height when you are seated with your feet flat. If the desk is too high and cannot be changed, raise your chair and add a footrest. If it is too low and cannot be changed, Mayo Clinic suggests putting sturdy blocks under the desk legs.
- **Keyboard and mouse.** Keep both close to you and directly in front of your body, so you do not reach forward or bend your wrists up or down while you type.

- **Space under the desk.** Leave enough room for your knees, thighs and feet, and avoid storing boxes under the desk, since they force you to sit at an angle.

If you work at a kitchen or dining table, the same rules apply. When the table is too high for your chair, a firm cushion and a footrest can bring your elbows and feet back into position.

## Set Your Screen and Neck Position




**Place the top of your screen at or slightly below eye level, about an arm's length away, directly in front of you.** At this height your head can stay balanced over your shoulders instead of drifting forward to read.

The reason is simple mechanics. The further your head moves ahead of your spine, the harder your neck and upper back muscles work to hold it up. A screen that sits too low or too far away is the most common cause, because you lean in without noticing. If you catch yourself leaning toward the screen, move the screen closer to you before you change anything else.

A quick way to check your neck position:

- Sit back in your chair and look straight ahead. Your **ears** should sit roughly above your **shoulders**.
- Gently draw your head straight back, without lifting your chin, until it feels stacked over your shoulders. This is a **chin tuck**, and it should feel mild, never forced.
- Keep your shoulders relaxed and lowered, not pulled back or raised.

## Working on a Laptop

**A laptop cannot be set up well on its own, because the screen and the keyboard are attached.** If you raise the screen to eye level, the keyboard rises too, and your arms and wrists end up in a worse position than before.

The fix is to separate them. Laptop ergonomics guidance from Duke University Safety recommends raising the laptop screen to eye level and using a separate keyboard and mouse at elbow height. Here is how to do it with what you already have:

- **Raise the laptop** with a laptop stand, or a stack of sturdy books, until the top of the screen reaches eye level.
- **Add an external keyboard and mouse**, so your hands can work at elbow height with your wrists straight.
- **Use an external monitor** if you can. It makes the setup much easier, especially if you work long hours.
- **Short on equipment?** If you only have the laptop, keep your sessions short and take more breaks, and raise the screen first when you can add one item.

This is also the setup to use at a kitchen table or on a sofa, where the surface is rarely at the right height. The more hours you work this way, the more it matters to separate the screen from the keyboard.

## Move Often, Because No Position Stays Comfortable

**Change your position regularly and stand up about every 30 minutes, even if only for a minute or two.** A well-set-up chair reduces strain, but it cannot replace movement, because sitting still for long periods is tiring for the body whatever the posture.

OSHA makes the same point in its workstation guidance. Even a good working posture should be varied through the day by making small chair adjustments, stretching, standing up and walking around, and doing some tasks while standing. The aim is not to find one perfect position and hold it, but to keep moving between several comfortable ones.

Research supports short, frequent breaks. In a small laboratory study from Columbia University, 11 adults sat for eight hours and followed different walking schedules. Five minutes of walking every 30 minutes was the only schedule that significantly lowered both blood sugar and blood pressure, and walking breaks also improved mood and reduced fatigue. The study was small and did not measure posture, so treat it as a practical guide rather than a rule. It does show that regular movement matters more than holding one position perfectly.

You do not need a complicated routine. Use these short movements at your desk, and add a walk when you can:

- **Shoulder rolls** release tension in the neck and upper back.
- **Seated spinal twist** keeps your upper back mobile. Turn gently, without forcing the movement.
- **Calf raises** help circulation in the legs. Lift your heels while you stay seated, or while standing.
- **Neck stretches** ease the strain of long screen use. Move slowly and stop if you feel pain.
- **A short walk** is the simplest reset. Walk to get water, take a phone call on your feet, or stand during a meeting.

If you have a sit-stand desk, use it to **alternate positions** rather than to stand for hours. Standing all day brings its own fatigue, so a mix of sitting, standing and walking works best.

If you want a deeper look at what long hours of sitting do and how to test your seating comfort, read our guide on sitting more than 6 hours a day. If you have a medical condition or ongoing pain, check with your doctor or physical therapist before starting new stretches.

## Common Sitting Mistakes and How to Fix Them

**Most sitting discomfort traces back to a handful of setup problems, and each one has a simple fix.** Use the table below to match what you feel to the most likely cause, then change one thing at a time so you can tell what helped.

| What you notice | Likely cause | Quick fix |
|---|---|---|
| **Ache in the lower back after an hour or two** | Sitting on the front of the seat, or a backrest that does not fill the curve of your lower back | Push your hips back into the seat and add a small lumbar roll if the chair has no lumbar support |
| **Pressure or numbness in the thighs, or pressure behind the knees** | Seat too deep or too high, with the seat edge pressing behind the knees | Lower the seat, use a footrest, and leave a gap of about two fingers behind your knees |
| **Sliding forward or slumping in the seat** | Chair too low, or a backrest tilted too far back | Raise the seat so your knees sit about level with your hips, then reset the backrest angle |
| **Tight neck and shoulders** | Screen too low or too far away, or armrests set too high | Raise the screen to eye level, bring it closer, and lower the armrests until your shoulders relax |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Sore wrists or forearms** | Keyboard too high or too far forward, with wrists bent while typing | Bring the keyboard and mouse close, at elbow height, and keep your wrists straight |
| **Tired, heavy legs** | Feet dangling or tucked under the chair, or too little movement | Support your feet flat, and stand up and walk about every 30 minutes |

These everyday habits also add strain over time:

- **Sitting on the front edge of the seat.** It leaves your back unsupported and makes your core work the whole time.
- **Leaning on one side or sitting on one leg.** It loads one hip and one side of your back more than the other, so switch sides often.
- **Working from a sofa or bed.** Soft, low surfaces make it hard to keep a supported back and a raised screen, so move to a table and chair for longer tasks.
- **Fixing everything with one adjustment.** A cushion, a footrest or a new chair rarely solves a poorly set-up workstation by itself, so check each part of the setup in turn.

If the same discomfort keeps returning after you have adjusted your setup, or it is getting worse, do not keep working around it. See the section on when to talk to a doctor below.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### How should you sit properly in an office chair?

**Sit with your hips back in the seat, your feet flat on the floor or on a footrest, your knees about level with your hips, and your lower back supported by the backrest.** Keep your forearms roughly parallel to the floor, your shoulders relaxed, and the top of your screen at or slightly below eye level. Then change position often, because no single posture stays comfortable through a full workday.

### Is the 90-90-90 rule correct for sitting?

**The 90-90-90 rule is a useful starting point, not a strict requirement.** It asks for roughly 90-degree angles at your hips, knees and elbows. OSHA's description of a neutral posture is a little more flexible, with elbows bent between 90 and 120 degrees and a slightly reclined back, between 105 and 120 degrees from your thighs. Use the rule to check your setup, then allow small variations so you do not hold one rigid angle all day.

### What should you do if your feet do not reach the floor?

**Use a footrest, or a sturdy stool or box, so both feet are fully supported.** Feet that dangle leave your thighs carrying weight and can press the seat edge into the back of your legs. Set the chair height for your desk and arms first, then add the footrest to close the gap. Your thighs should stay roughly parallel to the floor, and the footrest should be stable and large enough for both feet. If your chair is simply too low, our guide on how to raise your office chair height covers the fixes.

### How high and how far away should your screen be?

**Place the screen about an arm's length from your eyes, with the top of the screen at or slightly below eye level.** Position it directly in front of you, so your head can stay over your shoulders. If you lean toward the screen to read it, bring the screen closer or increase the text size before you change anything else.

### Is it bad to sit with your legs crossed?

**Crossing your legs now and then is not harmful in itself, but holding it for long periods can strain your hips and lower back.** It twists the pelvis slightly and can reduce circulation to the legs. If you cross your legs out of habit, switch sides, keep it brief, and return to both feet flat on the floor. If you feel the urge to cross your legs often, it is usually a sign that your chair, seat height or footrest needs adjusting.

### How often should you get up from your chair?

**Stand up and move about every 30 minutes, even for a minute or two.** OSHA recommends changing your working position often, and a small Columbia University study found that five minutes of walking every 30 minutes gave the strongest results among the schedules tested. You do not need a long break. A short walk, a stretch or a phone call on your feet is enough to reset.

### How do you sit properly when working from home on a laptop?

**Raise the laptop screen to eye level and use a separate keyboard and mouse at elbow height.** Use a laptop stand or a stack of sturdy books for the screen, and keep your feet supported. Sit on a firm chair with back support, rather than on a sofa or bed. If your kitchen table is too high for your chair, raise the chair and add a footrest so your elbows and feet land in the right positions.

### Does a seat cushion help you sit properly?

**A seat cushion can make sitting more comfortable and add a little height on a low chair, but it cannot correct your posture on its own.** Chair height, screen position and regular movement matter more. The sitcushion Office Seat Cushion is designed for pressure relief and all-day comfort, with a U-shaped coccyx cutout and memory foam, not to tilt your pelvis. For a closer look at what cushions can and cannot change, read our guide on whether posture cushions really work.

## When to Talk to a Doctor

**See a doctor if your discomfort keeps returning or keeps getting worse after you have adjusted your setup, or if you notice numbness, tingling or weakness.** A good workstation reduces strain, but it cannot diagnose or treat the cause of pain, and persistent symptoms deserve a proper assessment.

Some symptoms need urgent attention. According to NHS guidance on back pain, go to **emergency care immediately** if back pain comes with any of the following:

- **Pain, tingling, weakness or numbness in both legs**
- **Loss of feeling around your genitals or anus**
- **New bladder or bowel problems**, such as difficulty passing urine or losing control
- **Chest pain**

The same guidance advises getting **urgent medical advice** if your back pain starts suddenly and is severe, is getting worse quickly, or comes with a fever or feeling generally unwell.

This guide offers general information about sitting comfortably. It is not medical advice, and it does not replace an assessment by a doctor or physical therapist, especially if you have an existing condition or are pregnant.

## Where a Seat Cushion Fits in a Good Setup

**A seat cushion is the last adjustment, not the first.** Set your chair height, backrest, screen and breaks first. Then add a cushion only if something is still missing, such as a seat that feels too low or a hard seat that puts pressure on your tailbone area.

The sitcushion Office Seat Cushion is a memory foam cushion designed for pressure relief and all-day comfort. It has a **U-shaped coccyx cutout**, a **non-slip base**, a **removable, washable cover** and a **lifetime money-back guarantee**, and it measures 17.5 x 20 x 5 inches. It is not built to tilt your pelvis or correct your posture by itself.

If you add a cushion, recheck your setup afterward. A cushion raises your seat, so your feet should still rest flat on the floor and your elbows should still sit at desk height. If your feet no longer reach

the floor, add a footrest or lower the chair. To compare options, see our guide to choosing an office chair seat cushion.

## Bottom Line

**Sitting properly comes down to a few checks, done in order.** Set your seat height so your feet are supported, sit back and support your lower back, bring your arms and screen into position, and move regularly. No position is right for eight hours, so the goal is a comfortable setup that you change often.

Start with the checklist near the top of this page, fix the one row that does not match, and give your body a week or two to adjust. For more practical guidance on sitting comfort and back health, visit our Knowledge Center.