



MOUNT SINAI
SCHOOL OF
MEDICINE

MOUNT SINAI – IRVING J. SELIKOFF CENTER FOR OCCUPATIONAL & ENVIRONMENTAL MEDICINE

Program to Prevent and Treat Work-related Musculoskeletal Disorders

Survival Guide to Choosing an Adjustable and Padded Office Chair

The ideal chair provides you with proper spinal and upper body support. These are the important components of comfortable, well-made chairs:

- **Padding of the seat, back and arms:** Well-padded chairs help spread the weight of your upper and lower back and hips, reducing compression and stress of discs, nerves and muscles. Padding does not have to be thick, but it does have to be comfortable and durable.
- **Adjustable seat height:** A seat that is too high or too low can put a lot of stress behind the knees and over a concentrated area of the buttocks. It also makes it hard to support your back properly. Your back and thighs should be at right angles or even wider to each other to help relax your back and hips. So, your knees should be parallel to the floor, pointing slightly downward while you are sitting erect, or parallel to the floor while your body is leaning slightly backwards.
- **Adjustable armrests:** Supporting the arms is good because it reduces work done by the neck, upper back and shoulders. But armrests can also encourage stressful postures while typing if your armrests do not fit you properly. Armrests that are too low or too high, or get in the way of moving closer to your keyboard, may be worse than none at all. If you prefer chairs with armrests, they must be adjustable for height and, ideally, can be moved in and out and back out of the way when you do not need them.
- **Adjustable back support:** Sitting for long periods can strain back muscles, compress spinal discs and weaken ligaments. To prevent back pain, make sure the chair provides proper support for your upper and lower back. Office chairs should have adjustable full back support built into the backrest. Part of the full back support includes a lumbar support that should fit comfortably within the small or hollow of your back.
- Additional considerations in a padded and adjustably designed chair include adjustable
 - forward/backward seat depth
 - forward/backward seat tilt
 - backrest forward/backward tilt
 - backrest up/down height

Aim for comfortable, well-supported sitting



THIS



NOT THIS

Questions to ask when looking at chairs:

- Is the chair and adjustment hardware well-built and sturdy?
- Can you adjust the chair easily while sitting?
- Are the backrest, armrests and seat padded?
- Are these adjustable?
 - seat height
 - armrests (width and height)
 - seat depth
 - back rest height
 - back rest and seat pan tilt
- Does the chair support you in the lower and mid back?

Selecting a chair can be the most complex task you face when customizing your equipment and workspace. A good chair is expensive. Take your time when choosing a chair to make sure you get one that suits you. Ask the dealer if they can provide your choice as a loaner chair for a week or two.

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