Organize your workspace for better health

Sitting for prolonged periods hunched over a computer, working at a cluttered desk, and having a drawer stuffed with unhealthy snacks is a recipe for fatigue, low productivity, muscle strain and possibly weight gain. This spring, make some fresh changes to adjust your workspace—you’ll feel and perform better! Try these tips:

Arrange your work station to reduce strain on your neck, shoulders, wrist and back. Keep the top of your computer monitor screen slightly below eye level and positioned an arm’s length away. Place your keyboard and mouse to keep your wrists straight and try using a padded wrist rest. Adjust your chair to keep your feet flat on the floor, knees level with your hips.

Go from seated to standing, when possible. Check to see if a standing platform desk is an option.

Declutter your desk—and computer. Make a To-Do folder for any paperwork or reports you need to address and file or toss any papers that have piled up. Stash less important digital files and programs into a folder, too. Don’t forget to clear out your email inbox!

Keep only healthy snacks on hand. Good choices: single-serve bags of popcorn, individually wrapped dark chocolate squares, sliced fruit and veggies (kept cold with a small ice pack), unsalted nuts, or trail mix. Always keep a filled water bottle handy—a few sips can often satisfy a sudden snack attack.

Put a reminder on your computer to take stretch breaks! Movement helps prevent stiffness, improves circulation, reduces fatigue, protects against long-term damage…and increases your productivity.

Let your healthcare practitioner know if you have ongoing work-related back, neck, wrist or other muscle pain and get their advice about the best methods to help manage and prevent discomfort.

Fitness is for life

Exercise is one of the best things you can do to contribute to your health and well-being. No matter your age or stage in life, there are many healthy reasons to exercise and many exercises you can participate in. Exercise may help you control your weight, feel happier, and improve your outlook, balance and coordination, brain function, energy levels and quality of sleep. It may also help reduce the risk of serious health issues such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer, as well as the chance of cancer recurring.

Keep these tips in mind as you plan your exercise.

• Aim to get at least 150 to 300 minutes (5 hours weekly, or an hour on most days of the week) of moderate-intensity exercise, like brisk walking, or 75 to 150 minutes of vigorous exercise each week, such as hiking uphill or running.

• Build up beyond 300 minutes—gradually. Take your time to build your strength and endurance with exercise. The more physical activity you do, the greater the benefits experienced, but doing too much too soon can be dangerous!

• Include strengthening activities such as crunches, push-ups, free-weights or machine-based lifts to work all of your muscles.

• Schedule too tight to even fit in 150-300 minutes of exercise this week? Aim for incorporating physical movement into everyday activities—taking the stairs instead of the escalator, for instance. Consistent movement is key to better health!
Stressed out and overeating?
Learn to take control

Are you in the habit of devouring stacks of cookies or gorging on chips when you're stressed out, anxious, angry, sad or bored? It's common to use food as a way to stuff down or alleviate stress and other uncomfortable emotions. Here are some healthier ways to manage stress and other strong feelings and regain control of your eating habits.

**Identify your personal triggers.** What's causing you to eat when you're not hungry? Is it stress when you're on a deadline? Bored on the weekend? Be specific.

**Plan alternatives to eating when faced with triggers.** Here are some ideas:

- Read, listen to music, go for a walk, exercise, or play a game
- Start (or revive) a hobby
- Follow the “10 minute rule”: When you feel the need to eat, wait ten minutes to see if the urge passes
- Write positive notes to yourself
- Drink a glass of water, garnished with fresh lemon
- Most importantly, make an in-between-meals plan to be prepared if emotional triggers arise

**Develop healthy eating habits**

- Learn to recognize real hunger vs. stress eating
- Eat well-balanced meals at set times each day
- Don't eat “family style” with serving bowls set on the table. Instead, dole out individual servings and choose small plates to help control portions.
- Have healthy, single-portion snacks, like popcorn, on hand
- Pay attention and eat mindfully. Slow down and savor every bite.

**Try stress management strategies.** Yoga, tai chi and mindfulness meditation can help slow down your reactions, offering healthy ways to alleviate strong emotions.

**Upsetting emotions driving you to overeat?** Talk to your healthcare practitioner, who may suggest healthier habits to cope with emotions, or refer you to a specialist.