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Top 10 Tips to Pick the Best Office Chair

By [Ian Atkins](#) on June 6, 2016 | [Running a Business](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

Why does having the best office chair matter? Well, a recent Gallup poll found that adults working full-time in the US work an average of 47 hours per week. In fact, 39% of those polled reported working more than 50 hours per week. That suggests that almost 40% of US full time workers are putting in close to 2,500 hours at work per year.

Being stuck in an office chair that long isn't healthy!

No really - it isn't.

The U.S. Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) says that these working conditions can lead to musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), repetitive strain injuries (RSIs), and cumulative trauma disorders (CTDs).

These workplace injuries are so common that the OSHA says that "work

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These workplace injuries are so common that the OSHA says that work related MSDs are among the most frequently reported causes of lost or restricted work time.” In fact, in 2013 MSD cases “accounted for 33% of all worker injury and illness cases.”

For most of us, working less or not sitting in a chair just aren't options. Luckily, there are ways to help prevent the scourge of MSDs, RSIs, and CTDs without turning your office into a pilates studio. And getting the best fitting office chair you can is one.

We've collected the top tips from doctors, universities, state agencies, and ergonomic furniture professionals to help you pick the best office chair. Here are Fit Small Business's 10 Tips to Pick the Best Office Chair and 5 Signs You Need a New Office Chair

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10 Tips to Pick the Best Office Chair

Tip 1: Good Office Chairs Have a Full Back

“Office chairs are essential for productivity and reduction of lost hours due to injury,” said [Dr. Scott Schreiber](#), “Office chairs should be comfortable and have a full back. They should provide a multitude of adjustable positions, including lumbar support, height, and recline settings.”

Tip 2: The Best Office Chairs Have Waterfall Seats

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The [New Jersey Department of Labor](#) says the best office chairs will have “chair seat edges that are rounded (sometimes referred to as waterfall).”

Tip 3: Your Joints Should be Comfortable at 90 Degree Angles

According to [Dr. Matt Tanneberg](#), “Common signs that an office chair isn’t the right fit for you is if the angles of your hips, knees and ankles aren’t comfortably at 90 degrees. If your hips are not at a 90 degree angle then the chair is either too tall or too short for you. Same goes for your knees and your ankles. All of your joints should ideally stay at 90 degrees.”

Tip 4: Don’t Ignore the Upholstery – Breathable is Better

An office chair’s upholstery must be comfortable to the touch if you’re going to sit on it all day. You don’t want it scratchy, pokey, or something that will cause your to overheat. Even the [Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program](#) (CAP), which advises the Department of Defence and Federal Government, recommends a “breathable, medium texture upholstery.”

Tip 5: Your Office Chair Should be Adjustable

“The key to a good office chair is that it must be adjustable in all directions,” says [Dr. Matt Tanneberg](#) “The seat must adjust up and down, as well as tilt side to side. This is necessary to achieve proper posture when you’re sitting all day.”

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posture when you're sitting all day."

Tip 6: Adjusting Your Office Chair Should Not Require Tools

Recognizing the importance of adjustable office chairs for worker health, [New Jersey Department of Labor](#) further recommend that "chairs should be easily adjustable without a tool." Don't be afraid to ask for a demonstration or try adjusting a chair for yourself before purchasing.

Tip 7: A Good Office Chair Supports You, Even When You're Being Bad

"Your chair should support your back as you sit," according to the [University of New Hampshire](#). "It's okay to recline the chair back slightly, but too much can strain the neck as you try to right your head to view the monitor if you are using a computer."

Tip 8: The Seat Must Fit You For the Backrest to Work

"If the seat pan is too big or the seat is too high," says [Iowa State University](#), "Even where the chair has a backrest with lumbar support workers may continue to be exposed to static loading because they cannot take advantage of the backrest. Many employees respond by sitting forward, instead of against the backrest, so that their feet can be on the ground, thus pressing the spine out of the natural curve and placing pressure on the discs."

Tip 9: Top Office Chairs Should Encourage You to Move

The pioneers in ergonomic office furniture at [HermanMiller](#) say “Moving, and an ergonomic office chair that encourages it, helps keep blood and oxygen flowing.” The best office chairs not only let you move but “let you move while giving you the support your body needs.” So when you try out a chair, really give it a test drive.

Tip 10: Don't Forget About Your Arms and Shoulders

Both of the chiropractors that we interviewed said it is easy to overlook how a chair feels to your arms and shoulder. Dr. Tanneberg said “Another common sign a chair isn't right is if you have to shrug your shoulders to get your elbows on the armrests.” Similarly, Dr. Schreiber said that a chair's “arm and hand positions” should offer the same flexibility to avoid “developing pain in the shoulder, elbow, and wrist.”

Want to see the office chairs we use at Fit Small Business? See our [guide](#).

5 Signs You Need A New Office Chair

Sign 1: Listen to Your Body – If You're In Pain, You Need a Change

“Our bodies were not designed for sustained positions for extended periods. Pain is the easiest way of telling that your chair is not for you,”

said [Dr. Scott Schreiber](#). “ An ergonomically correct office chair can provide comfort, but if it is not replaced every few years, it can also be your undoing.”

Sign 2: Replace Your Office Chair Every 5 Years

“Office chairs should typically be replaced within a five year period,” says [Dr. Matt Tanneberg](#), “This helps to keep the cushion and support strong enough so that you aren’t sinking into the seat too much or able to slouch back in your chair.”

Sign 3: Trust Your Eyes

If your office chair is looking ragged, beware. Your chair’s posture will directly impact your own. Even avoiding tears in fabric or bumps in padding can throw off your posture. As Sara McKinniss of [Continental Office](#) said, “The indicators someone may need a new/different chair include: physical damage to the chair, worn materials, ongoing issues with appropriate posture and complaints of physical pain.”

Sign 4: If Your Office Chair Offers Little to No Lumbar Support

If your office chair’s backrest doesn’t provide good lumbar support or lacks a back at all it’s time to find a replacement. [Iowa State University](#) notes “when there is no lumbar support and the back is bent forward, the muscles of the back are trying to force the lumbar region out of its natural curve which places pressure on the discs and reduces blood supply to the spinal tissue. The constant exertion of the contraction

forces leads to muscle fatigue” soreness, stressed discs, and pinched nerves.

Sign 5: If Your Office Chair Doesn't Facilitate Good Posture

According to the [American Chiropractic Association](#), good sitting posture includes:

- Keep your feet on the floor (or on a footrest, if they don't reach the floor)
- Keep a small gap between the back of your knees and the front of your seat
- Your knees should be at or below the level of your hips
- Adjust the backrest of your chair to support your low- and mid-back
- Avoid sitting in the same position for long periods of time.

If your office chair is helping, it's hurting, and it's probably time for a new chair.

Summary:

Poorly designed or worn out office chairs can contribute to MSDs, RSIs, and CTDs. Combined, these injuries “account for an estimated 130 million total health care encounters including outpatient, hospital, and emergency room visits.” That means employees missing work and

businesses missing manpower.

All of that really adds up. The Institute of Medicine estimates of the total cost to the economy at “between \$45 and \$54 billion annually, as measured by compensation costs, lost wages, and lost productivity.”

If you feel like you’re spending all day in your office chair, it because you are. Don’t risk your health and wellbeing in a poorly designed or worn out chair. Using the tips in this article you have everything you need to pick out the best office chair for you.

Want to see the chairs we use at Fit Small Business?

Look at our [Best Executive Office Chair Recommendation](#) here.

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Ian Atkins is an analyst and staff writer for Fit Small Business currently specializing in ecommerce, retail, and product reviews. When not helping small business

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