Ergonomic Home Office Setup Checklist

Thirty checks, in the order that fixes things fastest. Print it, tick it, keep it in the drawer.

Work top to bottom. The chair comes before the desk, the desk comes before the screen, and the screen comes before anything you buy. Every check below is phrased so you can answer it yes or no while sitting in your own setup.

1. Chair and seat

Set the chair first. A desk height measured from a badly set chair is the wrong number.

- [ ] Feet flat on the floor, or on a footrest if the desk will not go low enough.
- [ ] Thighs and hips supported and roughly parallel to the floor.
- [ ] Back fully supported, with the lumbar support actually touching your lower back.
- [ ] Elbows in close to the body and bent between 90 and 120 degrees.
- [ ] Shoulders relaxed, upper arms hanging normally at your sides.
- [ ] Head level and forward facing, in line with your torso.

2. Desk height - the two numbers

Both numbers are elbow heights, measured floor to the underside of your forearm with shoulders relaxed.

- [ ] Seated height set to your seated elbow height, measured with your feet already flat.
- [ ] Standing height set to your standing elbow height, measured in the shoes you work in.
- [ ] Desktop thickness subtracted from both figures if you bought a frame rather than a finished desk.
- [ ] Both numbers saved as presets, so the desk is one button rather than a guess.
- [ ] Walking pad thickness added to the standing number if a pad lives under the desk.

3. Keyboard and mouse

OSHA puts the elbows at about the same height as the keyboard, with the forearms approximately parallel with the floor.

- [ ] Keyboard at elbow height, so your forearms sit roughly parallel to the floor.
- [ ] Wrists straight - not bent up, down, or to either side while typing.
- [ ] Mouse on the same surface and at the same height as the keyboard.
- [ ] Nothing digging into the underside of your forearms or the heel of your hand.
- [ ] Keyboard tray drop, if you use one, added back on top of the desk height.

4. Monitor

Desk height is set by your elbows and screen height is set by your eyes. They are independent, which is why a correct desk often still leaves the screen too low.

- [ ] Top line of the screen at or just below eye level.

- [ ] Screen between 20 and 40 inches from your eyes - roughly an arm's length.
- [ ] Screen directly in front of you, within about 35 degrees of your line of sight.
- [ ] Centre of the screen about 15 to 20 degrees below horizontal eye level.
- [ ] Laptop raised to the same rule, with a separate keyboard and mouse once it is.
- [ ] Second screen at the same height as the first, not stepped down beside it.

5. Floor, feet and shoes

- [ ] Anti-fatigue mat under the standing spot, not under the chair.
- [ ] Knees soft rather than locked straight.
- [ ] Weight even on both feet, not parked on one hip.
- [ ] Shoes you can stand in for an hour, and the desk height measured in them.

6. Movement through the day

OSHA's advice is to change working position frequently rather than to hold any one of them, including standing.

- [ ] Position changed frequently through the day rather than held.
- [ ] A few minutes of standing and walking built into each hour.
- [ ] The first sit-stand weeks built up in short blocks instead of a full standing day.
- [ ] Desk reminder or timer set, if you are the kind of person who forgets.

7. If your back is why you are reading this

- [ ] Seated setup fixed first - most of a working day is still seated.
- [ ] Standing swapped in before the ache starts, not after it arrives.
- [ ] Lumbar support adjusted to your lower back rather than left at the factory position.
- [ ] Anything specific, persistent, or getting worse taken to a clinician rather than to a desk.

Where the numbers come from

OSHA's Computer Workstations eTool is the source for the posture, keyboard and monitor figures above: elbows bent between 90 and 120 degrees, hands and forearms straight and roughly parallel to the floor, the top line of the screen at or below eye level, and a viewing distance of 20 to 40 inches.

BIFMA's G1 Ergonomics Guideline is the furniture-side document makers cite when they publish a height range - it is why a sit-stand desk is specified as a span rather than a single number. UPLIFT, for example, states that the V3 adjusts to meet ANSI/BIFMA G1-2013.

Keep going, on the site

Work out your two numbers
https://deskstance.com/guides/standing-desk-height-calculator

Standing desk posture, in full
https://deskstance.com/guides/standing-desk-posture

Standing desks for back pain
https://deskstance.com/standing-desks/best-standing-desks-for-back-pain

Chairs for back pain
https://deskstance.com/chairs-and-stools/best-chairs-for-back-pain

Anti-fatigue mats for back pain
https://deskstance.com/standing-mats/best-mats-for-back-pain

Monitor arms, to separate screen height from desk height
https://deskstance.com/storage-and-accessories/best-monitor-arms

Sources

OSHA - Computer Workstations eTool: Good Working Positions
https://www.osha.gov/etools/computer-workstations/positions

OSHA - Computer Workstations eTool: Monitors
https://www.osha.gov/etools/computer-workstations/components/monitors

OSHA - Computer Workstations eTool: Keyboards
https://www.osha.gov/etools/computer-workstations/components/keyboards

OSHA - Computer Workstations eTool: Workstation Evaluation Checklist
https://www.osha.gov/etools/computer-workstations/checklists/evaluation

BIFMA - G1 Ergonomics Guideline for furniture used in office work spaces
https://www.bifma.org/page/standardsoverview

General ergonomic setup information, not medical advice. If your pain is specific, persistent, or getting worse, see a clinician.