

How to Choose a Chair that Fits

Some factors to consider:

One size does not fit all . . .

The term “ergonomics” is often used these days to market fancy chairs. With so many options to choose from, how do you choose the chair that’s right for you? Even with “ergonomic” chairs, one size does not necessarily fit all. So where to begin?

Some features to consider:

Seatpan: The seat of your chair should be *comfortably padded* and flat or slightly contoured. It should support the even distribution of your weight over your thighs and back with your feet resting comfortably on the floor. If the seatpan is too soft or deeply contoured, it will be harder for you to change your position. Movement is important while sitting. The seat pan should be *wide enough* that you can shift slightly from side to side and *long enough* to support your thighs. You should be able to fit your fist between the front edge of the chair and the back of your bent leg.

The front edge of the chair should curve downward so that it does not press into the back of your legs. If you will be using your chair for a variety of tasks or sharing it with others, the seatpan should be height *adjustable*. The ability to tilt your seatpan forward is a nice option for people who perform forward sitting tasks or to take pressure off your lower back.

Base: The base of your chair should be *wide enough to promote stability* and prevent tipping. *Five casters* promote stability and allow the user to turn and move while avoiding awkward twisting.

Controls: Avoid a chair with too many or confusing control features. Controls should be *easy to reach and to use from a seated position*.

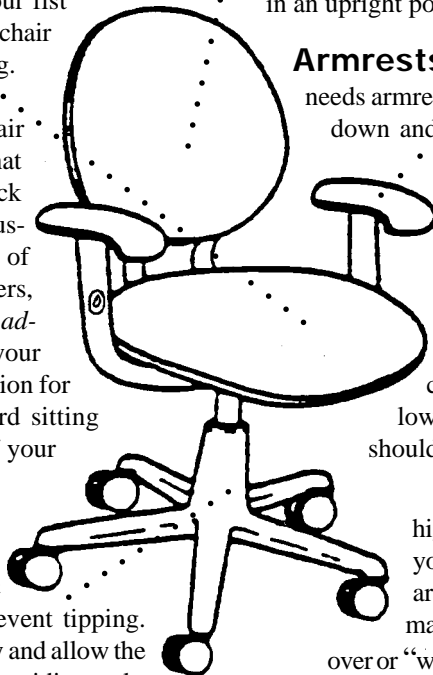
Backrest: The back of your chair should *support your upper and lower back* when sitting in a balanced, comfortable posture. The backrest should be *slightly curved* near the bottom to provide firm support to the natural curve in your lower back. You should be *able to adjust the backrest* so that it fits the curve in your lower back. A backrest that can be adjusted for angle is helpful to promote a change of position, but

- the backrest should be able to be locked
- in an upright position as well.

Armrests: Not every chair needs armrests. If you get up and down and move around a lot in your work, armrests may just get in the way. If you prefer armrests, make sure they are padded and support your forearms comfortably while allowing you to keep your shoulders relaxed.

Armrests that are too high cause you to raise your shoulders. If they are too far apart, they may cause you to lean over or “wing” your elbows out.

If you work at a desk or computer, be sure the armrests on your chair are *not so long* that they prevent you from moving in close to your work. *Adjustable* armrests can help you find a position that is at the right height and width to support your forearms comfortably.



Before you shop, think about how you will be using the chair. Different chairs may be better for different types of tasks. For example:

Recliners: For meetings or talking on the telephone, a chair with a reclining back and armrests may be most comfortable.

Upright: For tasks requiring a more upright posture such as typing or computer use, a chair that provides firm lower and upper back support is important.

Forward tilt: For writing or drafting, you may want a chair in which the seat tilts slightly forward.

Adjustable: For performing a wide variety of duties, you may need a chair that's adjustable. Adjustable chairs allow you to vary your position as you switch tasks. Adjustability encourages movement that promotes circulation and reduces fatigue and sore muscles. An adjustable chair is also critical if you will be sharing it with someone of a different height or build.

Try before you buy: Don't buy chairs out of catalogs! What a chair looks like on paper will tell you nothing about how it feels after a few hours of sitting. Try out a few different chairs, for at least a few hours if not a few days. Comfort counts!

Remember, these are guidelines to consider when choosing a chair. Seating needs vary according to the user and the task. Selection should be based on which chair feels most comfortable when you try it out.

Checklist for Choosing a Chair

Seat pan:

- ✓ Comfortably padded to promote even distribution of weight over your thighs?
- ✓ Wide enough that you can shift slightly from side to side?
- ✓ Not too deeply contoured or so soft that it is hard to change position?
- ✓ Long enough to support your thighs, but short enough that you can fit your fist between the front of the chair and the back of your bent knee?
- ✓ A front edge that curves downward so that it does not press into the back of your legs?
- ✓ Height adjustable so it can be used for a variety of tasks or users?
- ✓ Tilts forward for forward sitting tasks?

Chair back:

- ✓ Supports your lower and upper back?
- ✓ Adjustable to support the natural curve in your lower back?
- ✓ Adjustable back angle, if needed?

Armrests:

- ✓ Adjustable and/or removable?
- ✓ Padded and wide enough to support your arms comfortably?
- ✓ Short enough to allow you to move in close to your work?
- ✓ Support your forearms comfortably while allowing you to keep your shoulders relaxed?

Chair base:

- ✓ Wide enough to promote stability and prevent tipping over?
- ✓ 5 casters?

Controls:

- ✓ Easy to reach and use from a seated position?
- ✓ Not too many to cause confusion?