

Sewing Room Setup for Healthy Sewing

21.110

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SEW-lutions Guidelines

Your Guide
to
Successful
Sewing

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Setting up your sewing room properly is of paramount importance in regard to your physical well-being. Sewing, cutting and ironing in positions that tax your posture lead to fatigue, muscle pain, and chronic or serious conditions of the spine. Just as you measure and adjust a pattern to make a garment fit, so should you measure to find the proper heights for your sewing table, cutting table and ironing board. This is especially important for children. If a child really loves to sew, doing so with poor posture for many hours can impact his or her growing spine.

Today, corporate work spaces are ergonomically designed, which simply means body-friendly. Millions of dollars are spent each year on repetitive motion injuries, forcing companies to address the comfort and health of their workers. Ergonomics are very important when it comes to sewing since poor posture and awkward positions will result in early fatigue and pain in the shoulders, neck and back.

The four areas to be considered in the sewing room are your chair, sewing table or cabinet, cutting table and ironing board. Proper lighting is also important and will be addressed in another guideline.

The Right Chair

A good chair is a must, and there is no one chair that fits all bodies. Personal preference and the size of your body will determine whether a particular chair will work for you.

First, sit all the way back in the chair with your back against the chair back. Do not sit on the edge of the seat. Sitting improperly can cause myriad health problems ranging from poor leg circulation to upper back, neck, shoulder and hand pain.

A good chair has the following features:



A good chair is a must!

Pneumatic Seat Lift: This enables the seat height to be adjusted to accommodate the length of the legs. A good chair will have a warranty on the pneumatic lift and will not break down in a year.

Padded, Articulating, Waterfall Seat:

Articulating means that the seat can be tilted to be level or to slant down in the front. A waterfall seat curves down at the front edge (behind your knees), reducing the pressure on the back of the leg, which impedes circulation. Be sure to sit in a chair before purchasing it. If the chair's seat is too deep from front to back, the seat will cut into the back of the legs and impede circulation. If it is too shallow, it won't provide enough support.

Adjustable, Soft Armrests: Armrests support the weight of the arms, relieving the shoulders of undue stress. Again, sit in the chair and adjust the armrests to fit. If the armrests are set too wide, or too close for your comfort, and the armrest width is not adjustable, the chair does not fit you.

Lumbar Support: A good chair will have an adjustable back with lumbar curve. The chair's back should raise and lower, so you can adjust it to fit the curve of your back.

Sitting in the Chair

When sitting, your knees should be slightly lower than your hips. Your seat and hips should be fully "in" the chair with your back against the back of the chair. Position your legs out in front of you at a comfortable angle with your feet touching the floor. If your sewing table height is not adjustable and the chair is, you may need to raise the

chair to fit the table and put a footrest under the chair to support your legs.

Sewing Surface & Sewing Table

There is a distinct difference between the sewing surface (needle area) height and the sewing table height particularly with free-arm machines. If your machine is set into a table or a cabinet, the sewing surface and table height are one in the same. If your machine sits on top of a table, then the sewing table height is lower than the sewing surface (needle area) height. First find the proper sewing surface height; then raise or lower the table or cabinet so the needle area is at that height.



Sitting in the Chair Properly

To find the proper sewing surface height, sit in your chair, hold a magazine in front of you and read comfortably. Measure from your elbow to the floor and add 5.5" to 7" to that amount (the additional height is the difference between where your elbow is and where your hands will fall when sewing). This exercise will also give you the angle at which your machine should be tilted. When sewing, your hands should be in a straight line with your wrists and forearms, not bent forward.



Correct Posture for Sewing. (The Tilt'able is pictured under the machine. For more information on tilting your machine, see Guideline 21.115.)

The Cutting Table & Ironing Board

The height of the cutting table is as important as the sewing surface because of the many hours spent cutting, marking and pinning the fabric prior to sewing. If you're bending over a cutting table, you run the risk of straining and injuring the lower back. There are many

types of cutting tables, and there are adjustments that can be made so your table is the perfect height for you. It would be worth having a carpenter build a cutting table, or alter your existing one, so it is the correct height.

Cutting Table Height

Stand with your elbows bent at right angles, then drop your hands very slightly so your arms are in a comfortable position. This is the height your cutting table—and ironing board—should be. Lowering the table height slightly from the 90 degree angle prevents you from banging your elbows on the table. You may want to vary it a bit, depending on the type of work you're doing, but it should not be much lower.



Cutting Table & Ironing Board Height

Available Sewing Room Furniture

There is a myriad of sewing furniture available. There are adjustable cabinets that accommodate a sewing machine and a serger with containers on the doors that hold supplies, thread and notions. If these pieces aren't the right height, have someone alter them so they are the correct height for you. They usually tend to be too low, so adding height is many times easy for a carpenter. 🛠️

Credits:

The Perfect Sewing Chair™ and the Tilt'able are from: Ergonomic Advantage, 3898 South Jason St., Englewood, CO 80110 303-783-4810 www.ergonomicadvantage.com