

Northwestern

Ergonomics

Environmental Health and Safety

Table of Contents

I. Purpose	2
II. Scope.....	2
III. Responsibilities	2
IV. Evaluation	3
V. Equipment.....	3
VI. Prevention and Control.....	4
VII. Training	4
VIII. Recordkeeping	4
IX. Regulatory and Related Information	5
X. Contact.....	5

I. Purpose

This program establishes a process to promote employee health by limiting ergonomic risk factors through a combination of workplace self-assessment and adjustment, training, evaluation of workstations and practices, and implementation of ergonomic control strategies.

II. Scope

This program applies to all Northwestern employees whose job functions have the potential for work-related musculoskeletal injuries and disorders.

III. Responsibilities

A. Environmental Health and Safety (EHS)

- i. Adhere to the requirements of this program.
- ii. Review and revise this program, as necessary.
- iii. Provide ergonomics guidance, evaluations, recommendations, and training to employees, departments, and units, when deemed necessary.
- iv. Does not diagnose, cure, or treat conditions or diseases.
- v. Collaborate with the [Office of Equity](#) on cases that may qualify for a reasonable accommodation due to a disability or medical condition, and on cases involving employees returning to work from an injury or illness.

B. Departments and Units

- i. Adhere to the requirements of this program.
- ii. Ensure employees attend all required training.
- iii. At department or unit discretion, provide sufficient resources (e.g., financial) to implement ergonomics-related recommendations in a timely manner.
- iv. Support and encourage employees to utilize the resources and training on the ergonomics [website](#), and to [report](#) ergonomic-related injuries and hazards to Risk Management.
- v. Refer employees to the [Office of Equity](#) if they seek an ergonomics evaluation or equipment due to a disability or medical condition that may qualify for a reasonable accommodation.
- vi. Transfer employee ergonomic equipment for workstation re-assignments, including funding for disassembly and installation of ergonomic equipment, when feasible.

C. Employees

- i. Adhere to the requirements of this program.
- ii. Attend all required ergonomics training.
- iii. Report signs and symptoms of ergonomics-related injuries and hazards to supervisors and [Risk Management](#).
- iv. Submit an accommodation request to the [Office of Equity](#) if seeking an ergonomics evaluation or equipment due to a disability or medical condition that may qualify for a reasonable accommodation.
- v. Share ergonomics assessment reports and recommendations with medical care providers, if related to an injury or illness.

D. Ergonomics Evaluation Vendors

- i. Comply with Northwestern's [Contractor Safety Program](#).
- ii. Coordinate evaluations, recommendations, and equipment purchases with EHS and applicable departments, as necessary.
- iii. Provide thorough evaluation, reporting, recommendations, and recording of service(s) performed.
- iv. Work performed should be in accordance with the highest standard of care, adhering to all applicable federal and state rules and regulations.

IV. Evaluation

A. Self-Evaluation

Employees seeking ergonomics guidance or assistance related to their office equipment or workstation should first:

- i. Complete the applicable [Office Ergonomics](#) online training.
- ii. Conduct a self-evaluation and adjustments to alleviate common areas of discomfort using the resources on the [Ergonomics](#) webpage.

B. On-Site EHS Evaluation

- i. If additional assistance is needed after completing the self-evaluation procedures in **Section IV.A.**, employees may request an EHS ergonomics evaluation, which may include an evaluation of workstation setup, the work environment, the frequency and repetition of job tasks, and/or other work-related practices that may impact employee discomfort or the likelihood of an ergonomic injury.
- ii. If an ergonomics evaluation request is related to a disability, medical condition, injury, or returning to work from injury, contact the [Office of Equity](#) for guidance and next steps.
- iii. EHS evaluations are offered at no cost to employees and departments.
- iv. EHS will provide written documentation explaining any on-site adjustments made and equipment recommendations for eliminating or reducing ergonomic risk factors to the employee and their supervisor.
- v. EHS will follow up with employees 45-days after providing recommendations to determine if additional evaluations and recommendations may be necessary.

C. Vendor Virtual and On-Site Evaluation

- i. In certain circumstances, EHS may refer the employee to a vendor for additional evaluation and recommendations, either virtually (e.g., Zoom) or on-site.
- ii. Vendor evaluations are the financial responsibility of the employee's department.

V. Equipment

A. Ergonomic Office Equipment

- i. In the absence of signs and symptoms related to an ergonomic injury or disorder, an ergonomics evaluation is not required to purchase ergonomic office equipment.
- ii. When purchasing office equipment (e.g., chairs, keyboard trays, sit-stand desks) refer to the [Ergonomic Office Furniture Selection Guide](#) or contact EHS for guidance.

- iii. The decision to provide or purchase ergonomic office equipment is at the discretion of the employee's supervisor.
 - iv. The provision of specific equipment may be required in cases of a reasonable accommodation approved through the [Office of Equity](#).
- B. Sit-Stand Workstations**
- Although EHS acknowledges the [benefits](#) of sit-stand workstations, EHS does not make the determination of whether an employee needs a sit-stand workstation. The decision to provide or purchase a sit-stand workstation is at the discretion of the employee's supervisor.
- C. Remote Work**
- i. Refer to the [Policy on Workplace Strategies](#) for details pertaining to equipment use away from campus.
 - ii. Employees working remotely, away from their primary campus workstation, are encouraged to follow the guidelines available on the [Ergonomics](#) website.

VI. Prevention and Control

- A. Departments must implement timely and feasible methods to mitigate ergonomic hazards.
- B. When correcting ergonomic hazards, departments must prioritize controls and corrective actions in the following order:
 - i. **Elimination/Substitution** – Removal of excessive clutter of the workspace; replacement of defect or ineffective work equipment.
 - ii. **Engineering Controls** – Implementation of a physical change to the workstation, tools, and/or equipment that eliminates or reduces the hazard of the job/task (e.g., device to lift heavy objects, repositioning tables, redesigned tools).
 - iii. **Administrative Controls** – Reduce the exposure in the absence of physical changes to the area or process (e.g., job rotation, frequent breaks).
 - iv. **Work Practices Controls** – Safe procedures and techniques (e.g., proper lifting techniques, proper use of tools, correct use of ergonomic equipment).
 - v. **Personal Protective Equipment** – Protection to reduce exposure to ergonomics-related risk factors (e.g., padded surfaces, anti-vibration gloves).

VII. Training

- A. EHS is responsible for offering ergonomics training and maintaining all training records, via myHR.
- B. Departments are responsible for ensuring employees attend all required training, as applicable.

VIII. Recordkeeping

- A. **Ergonomics Evaluations**
 - i. Employees and their supervisors will receive an ergonomics evaluation and recommendation report.
 - ii. Ergonomics evaluation and recommendation reports will be maintained in accordance with Northwestern's [Employee Exposure Records Program](#).

B. Medical Information

EHS will not obtain, retain, or request medical information, or disclose any medical information voluntarily provided.

IX. Regulatory and Related Information

- A. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) [Ergonomics](#)
- B. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) [Ergonomics and Musculoskeletal Disorders](#)
- C. Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturers Association (BIFMA) [Standards](#)

X. Contact

For questions, contact Environmental Health and Safety, at ehs@northwestern.edu or (847) 467-6342.