Information Technology Ushers in the Era of Ergonomic Chairs by Joyce Smith

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Until a few years ago, the terms ergonomics or ergonomic chairs were unheard of or at least limited to the esoteric group of designers. A dictionary describes ergonomics as "the study of working conditions, especially the design of equipment and furniture, in order to help people work more efficiently." Even today, barring a few developed countries, ergonomics is not taken seriously and one may find office workers sitting on hardwood and plastic chairs and even benches and stools.

The renewed interest in ergonomics in general and ergonomic chairs in particular began after the post-1990s developments in the field of information technology. With computers and other electronic machines taking control of our lives, it became necessary, especially in an office environment, to sit longer time before the computers. Not only office workers, people in general today spend hours using computers for surfing, gaming and just about any purpose. This may take a heavy toll on their health and there are reports of young people barely out of their teens suffering from eye problems and backaches.

There are two sides of every coin. A computer cannot work on its own. It needs a person to operate it. Prudence requires that computer users should leave their chairs and spend a few minutes away from workstations after about every half an hour. That is not always possible in practice. Employers fear that this would provide an excuse for taking frequent breaks, besides hampering the work. Instead of allowing the staff to move often, organisations now try the next best option â€“ they invest in ergonomic chairs to provide as much as possible comfort to employees. The employers know that the initial heavy investment will pay off ultimately by way of added man hours or work put in by the employees.

Office Furniture designers do scientific study, research and experiments in the way people work, their posture, distance from eyes to computer screen, the height of table, leg room and many other factors before they come up with best designed ergonomic chairs. Such chairs usually have cosy, swivelling seat, curved back, adjustable levers, castor wheels and springs.

Studies have proven that efficiency of computer workers increase with the use of ergonomic chairs and workstations. More research is on. Recent experiments include automated chairs working on the hydraulics and pressure sensitive mechanical features. In future we may find a chair that will adjust its seat, back and height according to body and built of the person occupying it. Ergonomics is after all, the science of improving the efficiency of workers.

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Joyce Smith - About Author:
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