

Workplace Health and Safety Bulletin



Proper Height of Work Surfaces

Too high? Too low? Just right? Workers come in a variety of shapes and sizes. And the tasks they perform can vary from light precision work to assembling heavy and awkward equipment. Is one workstation appropriate for every worker and every task? Ask the tall worker with neck pain, crouched over a low bench for hours. Or the short worker, who has to raise her arms and shoulders too high, making it both uncomfortable and difficult to apply much force when necessary.

Ideally, work surface heights should be adjusted to accommodate different workers and different tasks.

Standing work

Setting work surface height

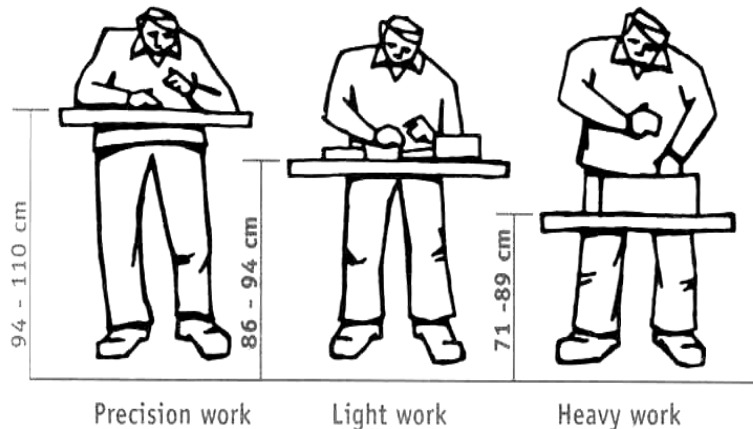
The movements workers perform with their hands, and the size of the objects they work with often determine the height of the work surface. When setting the heights, follow these simple rules

- For *precision work* involving fine visual details, such as writing or electronic assembly, set the work surface just above elbow height and provide support for the elbows.



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- For *light work*, such as assembly line or mechanical jobs, set the work surface just below elbow height.
- For *heavy work* in which a worker has to use downwards force, set the work surface 10 to 25 centimetres below elbow height.



Seated work

Getting the height just right

The rule for seated work involving reading, writing, or light assembly is that the work surface should be at about the height of the elbows when the arms hang straight by the sides.

If the work surface height is fixed, adjust the seat height so that the elbows are at about the same height as the top of the work surface. To be “just right”, the thighs should be parallel to the floor and rest on the chair without excessive pressure or pinching behind the knees. Feet should be placed comfortably, flat on the floor ahead of your knees. Feet not flat? — use a footrest. Feet flat but thighs not parallel? — time for a higher work surface.

For precision work, the work surface should be higher (by up to 15 centimetres) to improve task visibility and avoid an uncomfortable, stooped posture. Armrests can improve worker comfort and productivity. Whatever the seated work, leave plenty of clearance room for the feet and legs.

Work surface heights should be designed properly. Then adjust the height to suit the individual worker and the type of work they perform. Too high? Too low? No, just right.




More tips

- Provide plenty of clearance space for feet and knees.
- To reduce fatigue and discomfort during standing work, provide anti-fatigue matting and a raised rail on which workers can alternate resting a foot.
- Consider the size of the object being worked on when setting the height of the work surface. Always keep the worker at the “just right” height.


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