

# 10 WAYS

to Bring Office  
Ergonomics into  
Today's Flexible  
Workplace



[image source]

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[image source]

**Office ergonomics** has moved beyond the chair and workstation into workspaces that now encourage movement, collaboration, pop-up meetings and flexible working. Whilst product manufacturers have embraced many new innovations and materials for today's employee, workplaces are still struggling to bring those concepts into flexible offices for mobile workforces.

This checklist highlights the key ergonomic considerations for interior planners and designers, providing a quick guide to the furniture and solutions that deliver health and versatility in the modern office.

## Traditional ergonomics versus the new office ergonomics

A wealth of new research surrounding workplace wellbeing, sedentary living and productivity factors in the office has fuelled a new way of thinking about office ergonomics. This new research is reiterating why ergonomics is important in the office.

similar health issues to smoking – namely heart problems, diabetes and countless other diseases – as well as a host of back problems (one of the top reasons for employee absenteeism). It's one of the reasons why demand for sit-stand desks have risen so sharply.

Where the traditional ergonomics focused primarily on posture and position at a fixed, seated workstation, (e.g. correct office chair posture or the best office chair posture) we now know that changing position and relocating to different zones within a workplace brings countless benefits – especially in the flexible office.

It's not just the physical impact of environmental stressors in the workplace that must be considered with office ergonomics. The focus is now very much on the psychological wellbeing of workers too.

Sedentary sitting (or indeed standing for too long) has been reported to cause



[image source]

## How to solve office ergonomics in a flexible work environment

One way to approach ergonomic interiors in the modern office is to refer to the wellness frame-works from leaders in the field, such as the guidelines offered by the WELL Building standard. This checklist borrows from that standard but also looks more deeply into furniture and fittings.

Secondly, it's essential that the needs of the workforce and its diversity is assessed at an individual level too. What tasks are performed in the office and by whom? Young millennials? Older employees? Are people using large,

fixed place computers or mobile tablets and laptops? Are people working individually or in groups? Is collaboration key in the office or do people require concentration? How do these people respond to environmental conditions and ambience?

Only by profiling how the space will be used and by whom will you be able to plan the space ergonomically to appeal to all. In the case of the open office or coworking space, variety is key.



[image source]

# Task Zoning



[image source]



[image source]



[image source]

Coworkers aren't robots (yet!). They have differing needs at differing times. Expecting them to work the same way as each other, in the same place with limited movement leads to poor performance and wellbeing.

Instead, zone the workspace by task and function. Create separate areas for collaboration, meetings, training, admin and telephone.

Depending on the size of the space and number of workers,

this can easily be achieved with modular style booths, panels and storage solutions that create permanent or temporary areas within a larger space. With innovative new designs and colours by brands like Connection, these features can greatly contribute to the overall interior design.

Connection Hive, for example, allows the Interior Architect to facilitate multiple activities with minimal furniture. Their banquette booths are suitable

for both working and eating and come with integrated TV and technology for presentations, communications and entertainment. There is no need for additional walls or partitions. The booths are moveable, configurable and offer acoustic privacy and comfort in the open office.

# Multi-purpose Furniture



Furniture that can perform different functions can allow workers to change position without leaving their desk. Mechanical or manual sit-stand desks are common place and they've been joined by some interesting companions.

The Actiu desk, for example, can double up as a white board or can be attached to other desks to create a board table. Innovative solutions like these work just as well for small spaces as they do open, flexible offices.

[image source]

[image source]

# Acoustic Protection

Noise in the workplace is a well-documented environmental stressor in the workplace and can cause significant issues with productivity, morale and health. Whilst an energised atmosphere can charge a collaboration space and spark ideas, the sounds of eating, chatter, technology, laughter and phones ringing can seriously disrupt and interrupt others.

In the open office, various features should be introduced to improve concentration, phone calls and private meetings.

In a flexible work space, the best way to achieve balance is to zone the space and install meeting pods, phone booths and acoustic panels. Acoustic panels can be used as a creative interior feature as well as an ergonomic solution. Hush from Mikomax, for example, have created smaller panels that be grouped to form artistic wall pieces.

In offices with high ceilings, the bouncing echo of noise can also be reduced with hanging panels, soft furnishings and acoustically sound carpet, such as the environmentally innovative Interface carpet tiles, which can both zone a space and absorb sound.



# Privacy

Many people require privacy when discussing sensitive information on the phone or to a colleague. As with the acoustic solutions, booths provide an ideal closed space in an open place where meeting rooms or offices aren't available.

High-backed and hooded chairs also provide an acoustic and visual screen that creates a sense of privacy and dampens sound.

The 'meeting dens on wheels' from JDD, for example, provide an excellent visual barrier from the rest of the office simply by rotating the seating pod round, making it ideal for the flexible office.



[image source]



# Comfortable Havens

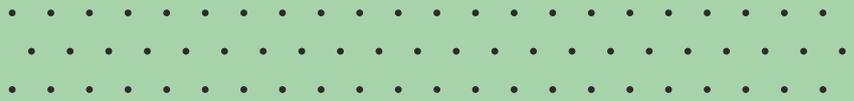
The always-on nature of technology and the fast pace of work life today means that downtime has never been more important. Many creative companies have already implemented measures that encourage play or relaxation by installing games tables, cafés and comfortable sofas – a concept that is now moving into the mainstream.

Plan for rest areas in the interior design by zoning with comfortable, flexible seating that can double up as meeting chairs or reclined for comfort and break-outs.

A great example of contemporary, configurable furniture is the range from SOFTLINE, that allows the same piece of furniture to be changed to suit different purposes such as lounging, sitting and even sleeping.



# Posture



The importance of attaining the right position at a workstation is still just as important as it always was – but now the focus is on task-based working, rather than fixed workstations.

Today, design and technological innovations have created new solutions for a more mobile

workforce. Interior architects can now choose desks and seating that not only support the health of an employee but brings aesthetic benefits that visually enhance a workspace too.

Humanscale are the current leaders in the world of office ergonomics and their award-

winning furniture continues to push boundaries in terms of health, flexibility and ecological benefit. From task-lighting and monitor arms to self-adjustable sit-stand desks and chairs made from fishing nets, their range encourages movement with comfort, support and great looking design.

# Movement



There are many ways to encourage movement in the office to reduce the now well-known problems associated with sedentary working. Whilst some companies have the luxury of being able to create fitness spaces for yoga classes and gym equipment, there are many other options for the smaller offices.

Saddle stools, balance boards and sit-stand desks help workers to change their position and use their core muscles while at their desk. These innovative furniture designs offer comfort and aesthetic appeal but perform an essential function for those who are reluctant to leave their desk for a lunchtime walk or stair climb.

They come in a range of colours, are height-adjustable and enjoyable to use. Of course, with any change in the workplace, there will always need to be a cultural shift to encourage employees to leave their desks, stand-up to work or take breaks from the screen. But, with the help of the interior designer, the way an office is planned and fitted-out can set the idea in motion.

# Nature



Biophilic design in the office is a major contributor to the wellbeing of employees and is now an important feature of office ergonomics. It has been shown to improve cognitive function, creativity and mood.

Psychologically, people feel and work better when they can see nature, either out of the window or in the office. Bringing the outside in is now much easier to achieve than ever before,

thanks to the wide choice available to designers.

From moss walls to office greenery, plants (living and artificial) can improve air quality, noise pollution, zoning and visual design. Similarly, introducing natural materials and colours throughout the work environment, also helps to counteract urban, industrial and technological stressors.

# Light



Natural light has been shown to raise energy and alertness in the office. Research from the International Well Being Institute and World Green Building Council reported that employees who worked next to windows enjoyed 46 minutes more sleep than those who didn't (outside of work). Employees who had access to natural daylight were shown to be 40% more productive, on average, than those who worked under strip lighting.

Where access to views and daylight is difficult, circadian lighting provides a great alternative. This LED lighting design emulates real light and changes throughout the day, casting a different light in the workplace, just as the sun would.

Strong window light isn't always a benefit if the sun glare is too strong, as it can cause visual issues with computer screen clarity. Installing shutters or blinds is essential for the visual comfort of workers.

Task-based lighting is growing in popularity, to give each employee self-adjustable light suited for purpose. However, overhead lighting is still required as this has been shown to enhance feelings of wellbeing and comfort, similar to the overhead light from the sun.

# Personal Storage

Personal storage isn't just useful for keeping an office tidy; it can facilitate personal space too.

Research from office furniture designers, Bisley, found that personal storage can contribute to the wellbeing of employees in several ways – especially for those that work in a flexible office.

Mobile workers who don't have a fixed desk still need a place to call their own. Lockers provide the ideal solution and can double up as room dividers and zoning partitions.

Workstation storage also provides privacy and creates a sense of personal space and belonging,

which has been shown to improve staff wellbeing, retention and productivity – as well as company profitability.

The iconic storage designs from Bisley still make a statement in the open office. With a new range of innovative, modular solutions that can be moved and reconfigured with a twist and a click, the cabinets, filing units and lockers are ideal for flexible workspaces.

## Ergonomics Influencing Interiors

Office ergonomics now influence every aspect of the office interior. From colour and lighting design to layout and furnishings, aesthetics feature alongside function and performance in ergonomic solutions.

With the multi-purpose nature of today's furniture designs, the possibilities are endless in the open

office environment. Combine that with the creative mind of the interior architects and we can expect to see some exciting innovations and wellness improvements in the flexible offices of tomorrow.



[image source]

If you would like to know more about office ergonomics and flexible furniture solutions, please get in touch with us at [sales@m2.ie](mailto:sales@m2.ie)