

Tips for Ergonomic Bench Work

by Charles Lewton-Brain

How do you move, sit, and work at the bench? How have you organized your space? At what heights are the surfaces that you work on during the day? All of these factors play a critical role in your physical health. The following tips from Charles Lewton-Brain—author, educator, and proprietor of Brain Press in Calgary, Alberta, Canada—will help you practice ergonomic safety.

Sit Right, #1:

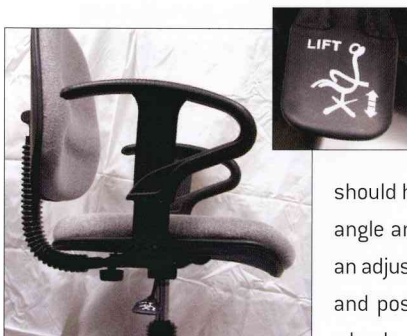
Perfect Your Posture

Various problems, including hemorrhoids and back pain, can result from a long sitting period. If you sit a lot, get up every 45 minutes to move around and change positions. And if you speak on the telephone while you work, get a headset so you don't have to hold your body in a strange position while you do both tasks simultaneously.

When seated, your legs and hips should be at a 90° angle to each other, with your feet flat on the floor and your knees at a comfortable angle. Your spine should be almost vertical, and your back should contact the backrest about 4 to 6 inches above the seat. If you'd like, use a footrest to raise your knees a little. This helps your lower spine stay flat. Using armrests can also prevent upper back strain.

Shift positions frequently to change the pressures on the spine. Moving your neck, head, and shoulders occasionally will also relieve stresses.

Watch out that your head and neck are not bent over forward when you're working, since this strains them. (Strains are more likely to occur if the spine is curved more than normal.) Do preventive exercises to stretch your back, body, and abdominal muscles at least three times a week.



Sit Right, #2:

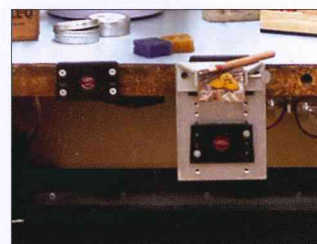
Invest in a Good Chair

Consider getting a nice, expensive, ergonomic chair. It should have an adjustable seat, both for angle and for height from the floor, and an adjustable backrest (for height, angle, and position). Avoid bench chairs with wheels, since they foster muscle strain when you try to keep the chair still. Opt for chairs with wool and rayon seat covers (as opposed to vinyl or other synthetics); they are porous and let body heat escape.

Ups and Downs:

Work at Different Heights

Jewelers often perform the wrong task at bench pin height because it's the main height available. Try working at different heights in a production situation. This may mean having different work-



stations and easily adjustable chairs and tables. A friend of mine, wax carver Kate Wolf, put two plates on her GRS adjustable height bracket so she could have two bench pin positions.



Don't Do the Twist:

Keep Tools Within Easy Reach

Develop better tool storage and access during use, and avoid excessive reaching for tools. Keep your tools in rotating bins, blocks that you can move around on your work surface, shelves, open com-



partments, and tool boards. You should never need to twist to reach a tool. For example, the need to open a drawer could cause you to move out of proper position and twist your body in injurious ways.

Get in Shape:

Work Harden Your Body

If you haven't practiced a skill for a while, be extra careful when you start it again. Restarting a job or beginning a new one should have a break-in period to properly condition your muscles and tendons. This can be fairly short when returning from vacation, but as long as four to six weeks for a new employee in an industrial shop.

Work at a reduced speed with more frequent breaks during this time. This is called "work hardening," and it's clearly much different than the work hardening that occurs in our metals.

Data and information used in this article was culled from Kathryn Grant's Case Studies: Biochemical Hazards in a Jewelry Manufacturing Facility; Merle Spandorfer's Making Art Safely; and Julian Waller's Safe Practices in the Arts and Crafts.



L to R: Darin Kath, President and COO; Jeff Mills, Claims; Sue Fritz, Marketing & Communications; Ron Harder, CEO; Dave Sexton, Loss Prevention

Jewelers Block

Property & Liability

**Safety and security
education**

**Expert claims
service**

It's a jungle out there!

CHOOSE AN EXPERT GUIDE

The jewelry industry is a wild and exciting ride, but don't underestimate the perils along the way. We have helped jewelry businesses find the road to financial security for more than 90 years. Let us be your expert insurance guide.

Ron

Ron Harder
CEO



Jewelers Mutual
INSURANCE COMPANY

800 558-6411 ♦ marketing@jminsure.com ♦ www.jewelersmutual.com