



The Role Footrests and Anti-Fatigue Mats Play in Healthy Office Ergonomics

The concept of neutral posture as referenced in ergonomics comes from NASA's ongoing study of the human body. The idea is simple: "neutral" is the body's posture under conditions of microgravity – i.e. weightlessness. The reason that it's become a goal in ergonomics is because it is simply the healthy stance of the human form – the posture we feel comfortable and most productive performing in.

And the beautiful thing about the body is that it is a well-connected machine. So in order to achieve this neutral posture we must look at alignment as affected and supported by the ergonomics of each aspect of the workstation. And what better place to start than from the ground up; proper attention given to the feet and legs promotes this ideal posture, contributing to greater well-being and productivity overall.

Just like the rest of our body, our feet and legs were designed for mobility and to thrive through movement. Ergonomic equipment in the office that supports greater comfort for the feet and legs and does so by encouraging activity in its design while supporting ergonomic angles in the body is ideal. The two important pieces of equipment to look at to achieve this are footrests and anti-fatigue mats.

Let's start with the feet by looking at ergonomic footrests.

Footrest Ergonomics

An ergonomic footrest lends healthy ergonomics by supporting a natural stress-relieving posture. This comfortable posture – feet raised to the right height for proper alignment through the lower body – relieves any previous pressure on the feet, back, knees, and legs. This adjustment improves circulation and increases energy levels. How exactly? Because the heart no longer has to work overtime to pump blood to the lower half of the body that previously had its circulation cut off. Most simply: more energy is freed up to focus!

Additionally, a great footrest, with angle/tilt-adjustability, offers the awesome freedom to move the position of your legs slightly throughout the day by adjusting the angle/tilt as comfortable. This kind of movement is needed to break up a static posture in the lower body that causes muscles to constraint and, you guessed it, that lead to poor circulation and fatigue. More immediately perhaps, this kind of movement just feels good.

And, depending on the model, some even lend extra relief through a massaging surface which the user can rub their feet around for a soothing feeling that also improves circulation.

Kinds of Footrests

There are three basic kinds of footrests – note that some are built with features from all three kinds.



Rocking: Rocks back and forth, facilitating perpetual movement



Stationary: Fixed in place at desired height and angle/tilt



Massaging: Surfaced with a massaging texture (*think: bumpy surface*) that can be rubbed to massage pressure points in the feet when used barefoot or with socks. *See the SoleMassage Exercising Footrest for an example of this style*

Signs That a Footrest Is In Order

The infamous feet dangle is happening or feet are resting on the castors

Ergonomics tells us that the feet should never dangle from the chair or rest on the castors; the feet should rest solidly on the floor or, in this case, on a comfortable footrest. Typically, you'll see the "feet dangle" at a workstation wherein a fixed height sitting desk is too high. Shorter people or people with shorter legs also tend to have trouble comfortably reaching the ground.

In both instances, the chair should be raised so that the keyboard is met at a comfortable ergonomic angle and a footrest should be used to allow comfortable, open, ergonomic angles through the lower half of the body to allow the best circulation.

The transition from fidgeting → focus is needed

For those who tend to get fidgety or distracted at work, a rocking footrest is an excellent way to foster focus – allowing the exertion of more frenetic energy through the subtle, active movement.

Chair(s) that lack waterfall edges

Using a footrest is an excellent way to achieve the same results of a waterfall edge (improved posture, improved circulation, and greater comfort).

Important Features to Look for in a Footrest



- **Height adjustable** For the obvious reason: we're all built differently.
- **Angle/tilt adjustable** For the freedom to move through postures throughout the day.
- **Wide platform** Everyone's natural stance and hip width is different. And leg shakers/jigglers will benefit from a wider platform that gives them more freedom to do their thing.
- **Stays securely in place** The keywords to look for here are: locking foot pedal, non-slip bottom, and anti-slip surface. Unless a rocking footrest is opted for, you want a footrest that stays securely in place so your legs and feet aren't tensed up while using it, but rather, relaxed into a comfortable, supported posture.
- **Accessible foot pedal for easy adjustment of height and angle/tilt** This is a simple spec but it really makes use of the product so much easier and more enjoyable. See how the SoleMate Plus Foot Rest can be adjusted by the foot, without getting out of the chair and crawling uncomfortably under the desk.
- **Easy to spot clean** If the plan is to take full advantage of a massaging surface by using it barefoot or with socks, look for a product that's easy to spot clean.

Anti-Fatigue Mat Ergonomics

Anti-fatigue mats are an equally important part of feet and leg care in the office if standing desks are being used.

The key: active standing

When you stand, your leg muscles are engaged to counter gravity and keep you upright. Anti-fatigue mats work by encouraging subtle, imperceptible movements of the leg and calf muscles so that muscles aren't held completely static while engaged (which restricts blood flow).

They encourage this subtle movement by almost forcing the muscles to stay engaged, in order to adjust to the flexible instability of the material of the mat (the "cushion"). This continual engagement alleviates pain, discomfort, and fatigue. And this is the science of active standing – i.e. comfortable standing!

Good on the feet, and great for energy levels

In addition to encouraging this active muscle engagement, the cushion of anti-fatigue mats just feels good on the feet when working upright (through better distribution of body weight and pressure). And in the same way that the use of a quality footrest restores energy, an anti-fatigue mat restores the extra energy that was spent pumping blood to and from previously constricted areas of the lower body that are now circulating blood easily.

So not only do they deliver on their promise of alleviating fatigue, they also increase overall comfort and energy levels throughout the entire body.



Important Features to Look for in an Anti-Fatigue Mat

- **Beveled edge** This will prevent the mat from rolling up, causing trips. Take our Anti-Fatigue Mat with a 18° angle designed specifically for an office chair to roll on and off with ease, as an example.
- **Anti-slip surface** For maximum sense of stability and support when working.
- **Easy-to-clean** As some find comfort using their mats barefoot or with socks.
- **Tear resistant** Look for the “NFSI Certified” stamp for a guarantee of the material quality.

A quality anti-fatigue mat and footrest, used in tandem, support the active sitting and standing postures that are key to comfort in the modern office. These dynamic postures improve circulation, restore energy levels, increase comfort, and contribute to both the productivity and comfort that ergonomics seeks to realize.

And the wonderful thing about both products is that they deliver a big bang for their buck: they are affordable and make a world of difference in immediate productivity and comfort. And if you're buying on behalf of an office – with its wonderful mix of leg dangles, fidgeters, and standing desk users – you'll observe firsthand, a huge difference that such basic equipment makes in the well-being of an entire team.



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