

A Model VDT Workstation

Buying the VDT is only half the job; the other half is remodelling your work area so that it is suited to VDT use.

The diagram below points out many features of a VDT work area which may affect your health. By following the guidelines in this diagram you can lessen many of the health problems which are related to your job. You are, of course, the best judge of what feels comfortable. Use this diagram as a guide: if a different set up seems better, try it out.

The key to the well-designed workstation below is adjustability. Some of the most important features are: • an easily adjustable chair • a detached keyboard on a surface that is low enough to keep your arms parallel to the floor • direct task lighting with dimmer overhead light • and enough work space to place the screen and copy holder at a suitable distance.

- Adequate ventilation
- No excess noise or crowding
- Adequate privacy
- Social contact with coworkers
- Relaxing colors and non-glare surfaces
- Windows with vertical blinds or curtains

Indirect general lighting; moderate brightness (may be turned off if desired)

Screen about 1-2 ft. away and middle of screen slightly below eye level; characters large and sharp enough to read easily; brightness and contrast controls; adjustable height and tilt; screen made with glare-proof surface; no visible flicker of characters

Terminal regularly serviced and cleaned; records kept where easily accessible

If necessary, special glasses for VDT viewing distance

Direct, adjustable task lighting

Copy holder at approximately same distance as screen

Adequate space for copy holder and other materials

Moveable keyboard on surface with adjustable height; arms approximately parallel to the floor

Thighs approximately parallel to the floor

Feet firmly resting on the floor; footrest for shorter people

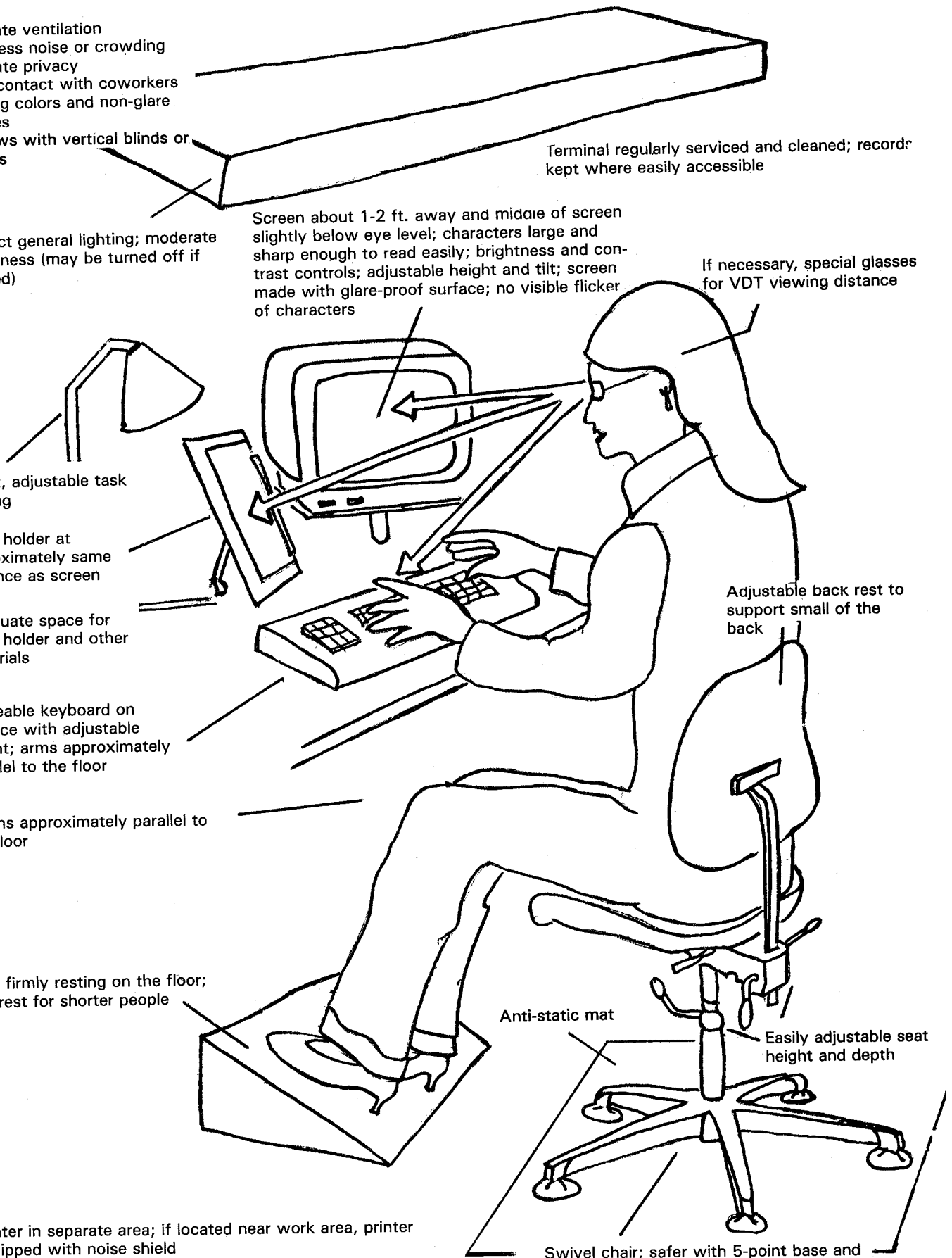
Adjustable back rest to support small of the back

Anti-static mat

Easily adjustable seat height and depth

Printer in separate area; if located near work area, printer equipped with noise shield

Swivel chair; safer with 5-point base and casters



Common Office Health Problems: Worse for VDT Users

Common office health problems—such as eyestrain, headache, back and neck pain, stress, exhaustion, tingling and pain in hands and fingers—are experienced even more often by VDT users. In fact, with the introduction of VDTs there has been a dramatic increase in daily health problems reported by office workers, with many of the longterm effects still unknown. Many of these health problems *can be prevented* by improving the design of your work area (where you work) and the job itself (what you do and how). Use the following checklist, along with the diagram on the other side of this sheet, to evaluate your VDT work area. (To evaluate your job, see OTEP Fact Sheet "More Than Meets the Eye.")

A Checklist for Your VDT Workstation

Does your VDT have:

- a detached keyboard
- non-glare glass (or an effective glare shield)
- brightness and contrast controls
- adjustable tilt
- adjustable height
- characters which are large and sharp enough to read easily
- no visible flicker

Does your desk have:

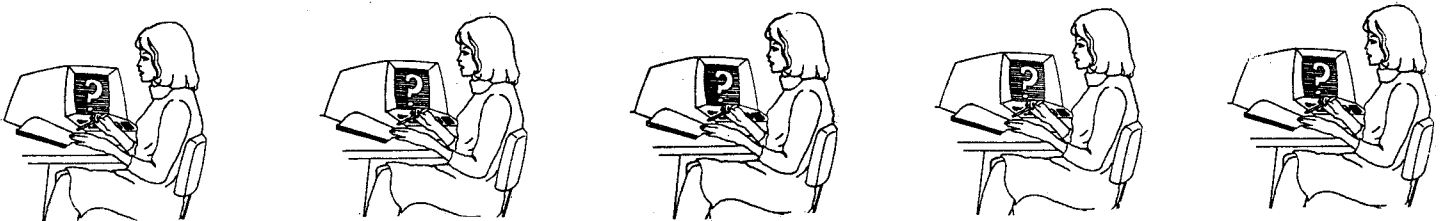
- a lower, adjustable surface for the VDT keyboard and a higher surface for the screen
- enough space for the materials you work with
- enough space so the VDT screen is at a proper distance (1-2 ft.)
- a non-glare finish

Are copy holders available?

Is your chair easily adjustable for height and support?

- Was the overhead office lighting dimmed when VDTs were introduced and desk lamps provided?
- Can the windows be shaded with blinds or curtains?
- Are noisy printers in a separate area? If not, are they covered with noise shields?
- Is your VDT quiet, that is, no annoying or high pitched humming?
- Do you feel you have adequate privacy?
- Is the office arranged so that you are able to have social contact with employees who work near you during the course of the day?
- Is your VDT regularly cleaned and serviced? Do you know the last time this was done?
- Do you have the right to a transfer during pregnancy if you choose not to work on the VDT?
- Has the manufacturer provided information about radiation levels measured during factory testing?
- Does management pay for regular eye exams and special viewing glasses if needed for VDT use?

If you answered "No" to many of these questions, your employer has failed to provide you with a proper work environment. You and your coworkers can help by suggesting changes which need to be made. By joining unions, 9to5 organizations, and health and safety committees office workers themselves have been able to win important improvements.



A Special Word about Radiation. . .

Perhaps most frightening and confusing is the fear of a problem pregnancy or eye damage resulting from radiation. There is no known radiation hazard from the low levels emitted by VDTs. However, there may be health effects we don't know about, and research is still being done. Reports of "clusters" of miscarriages and birth defects among VDT users and some recent radiation studies continue to raise questions. The risk, if any, is small. But given any uncertainty, it is best to err on the safe side and take reasonable precautions: 1) Terminals should be regularly serviced (at least once a year) to prevent any unusual emissions resulting from a malfunction. 2) Employees should not be regularly required to sit in front of a VDT all day long. Jobs should contain a variety of responsibilities, including work on and off the VDT. 3) Pregnant women should have the right to choose a transfer to a non-VDT job with no loss in pay. Once that right is secured, each individual must make her own decision, just as she might consider other changes in her life (such as giving up smoking or coffee) during pregnancy. 4) Other precautions include purchasing only equipment which has been factory tested for radiation emissions and installing metal screening inside or outside the terminal. (Seek more detailed information before adding screening.)

If you are a VDT operator who has had a problem pregnancy, report your experience to the appropriate state agency or to 9to5, Organization of Women Office Workers.