

Chapter 9: Travel Airplanes and Hotels

**Travel can be fun and exciting
but business travel may present some additional stressors**

- As a business traveler or “road warrior,” you are twice as likely to develop musculoskeletal disorders than your co-workers who work in the office all day
- You operate under the stress of critical schedules- commutes, flight connections and airport security delays that take a toll on your body and psyche
- Add to mental stress the fact that you’re hauling around baggage like a pack mule
- You’re cramped in an airplane seat or confined to ill-fitting airport/hotel seating that contorts your body and zaps your protoplasm

Even if your business travel is infrequent or only involves short hops you would be wise to heed some tips and *unravel* the ills of your *travel*.



Travel and Ergonomic Risks

The *Ergonomic Risk Factors*

- Awkward head/neck and upper limb postures using a laptop, reading or doing paperwork in a cramped airplane seat
- Prolonged and constrained sitting on a plane, train or auto
- Awkward and unsupported postures using computers on ill-fitted chairs and desk settings in a hotel room
- Awkward head/neck and spine postures working on laptops, reading or doing paperwork in bed
- Awkward loads on spine and contact stress on body parts when hand carrying heavy bags or using shoulder straps
- Use of force and awkward spine postures when lifting and handling heavy luggage



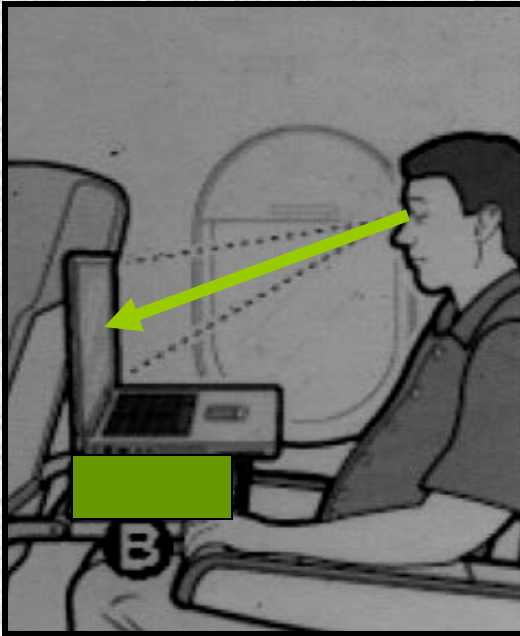
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Essential Tips & Techniques



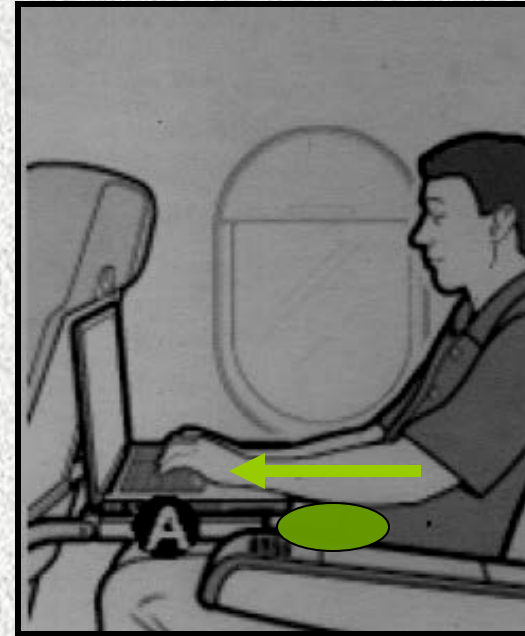
- Consider phone conferencing and avoid traveling
- Select seating on the aisle or exit rows for improved leg room - if you arrive at the last minute you are guaranteed the pain of a seat in the middle!
- Avoid hand carrying baggage- use wheeled luggage, a backpack or rent a cart
- For shoulder-strap bags (luggage or laptop) reach over your head and place the strap on the opposite shoulder so it rides across your chest and hip
Bonus: it won't slip off when you bend over
- Evenly distribute your carrying load between 2 hands and shoulders and periodically switch the loads
- Avoid wearing those very fashionable (and untested) new shoes and wear a pair of your most comfortable walking shoes
- If your flight is an hour long, limit laptop use – catch up on trade journals, daydream, take a cat nap or read another chapter of the novel you brought along

Techniques for setting up laptop on plane



If you're going to be doing a lot of reading...

- Set your laptop on tray with books under to elevate screen toward your eyes

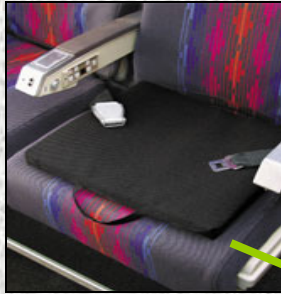


If you're going to be doing a lot of typing...

- Set your laptop on tray at elbow height
- Support your arms with pillows
- Use a detached mouse

Tell the person in front of you not to even think about reclining the seat back!

Cushion those sensitive spots!



Inflatable seat wedge



Inflatable seat cushion



Inflatable neck cushion



Inflatable lumbar cushion

If you have neck, back or lower limb sensitivity try a self-inflatable support cushion. They're lightweight, highly portable and are often more effective than their foam counterparts. While you can find these items at large drugstores, some of the best models are often available to order in those airline Skymall magazines. Another good option is to carry portable ice pouches that you can fill on the plane...a bonus body support and an anti-inflammation device.

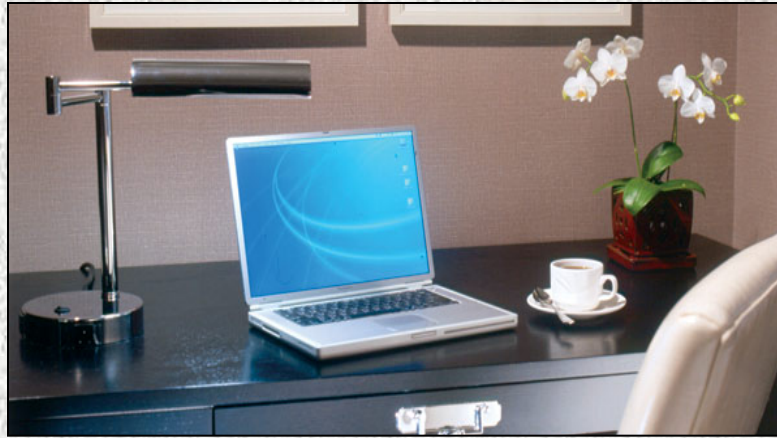
Travel- Airplane and Hotel



More Essential Tips

- Get up from your seat, move about and stretch hourly
 - *another reason to select the aisle seat!!*
- If you can't get up— you were late and got that dreaded middle seat...stretch in your seat lean torso side to side, rotate neck up/down and side to side, extend hands over your head, and stretch legs under the seat in front of you heels out (not toes pointed)
- Drink plenty of water (hydrate) and avoid salty snacks, alcohol and caffeine (dehydrate)
- If you have low back or neck problems, bring along an inflatable cushion for support where you need it.... or get first dibs on airline pillows and blankets to create these supports
- In a hotel room, use pillows on the chair to prop yourself up at the computer and a rolled towel as an armrest
- Use luggage or books to support your feet at a high desk
- If the lighting is too poor for you to read, try moving a standing lamp next to the bed
 - *just don't fall over it if you get up in the middle of the night*
- Avoid doing office work in your bed; it's a common source of neck problems for travelers. If you must, go for all the cushions and pillows you can round up to prop your back and neck.

The ergonomics of hotel rooms



Whether it's an ultra modern skyscraper or quaint B&B the ergonomics are the same and they are not user friendly!

- Desk is too high and there's a drawer preventing you from pulling up close
- Chair is too low, unsupportive and catches on the carpet with every shift
- Lighting is usually not bright enough to read

Techniques to use your laptop in your hotel room

Use your ergonomic knowledge to improvise

- Use pillows or couch cushions to prop yourself up in chair
- Use a pillow to support your low back
- If your feet don't touch the floor, use luggage or books to support your feet
- Elevate the laptop screen using a pillow or rolled towel at the rear underside of the laptop
- Use a rolled towel in front of the laptop for wrist support
- If light is not bright enough reposition lamp, remove the lamp shade or move other lamps closer
- If you're transposing from hardcopy, use the hotel guide (open binder) as a stand propped against the lamp base
- If you must do paperwork or use your laptop in bed, use pillows to prop up and support your neck and back curves



The rolled towel routine

Tools for using laptop in hotel room



There are lightweight and portable laptop stands that travel well. They solve the problem of elevating the laptop screen but create elevated angles for keying.

If you're primarily editing and proofing your work or tweaking a PowerPoint presentation (versus data entry), they can be great. Probably the best tool to have on hand is a detached mouse to minimize using a touch pad in this elevated laptop position.

Using laptops in airport terminals



In the airport, it's a common site to see people balancing the laptop on their laps or in their hands and just as common to see people using them on the floor. Reasons? No seat - Access to electric outlet - Waiting in line at boarding queue. And they get into some pretty contorted postures while doing it.

Tools for using a laptop on the road



The luggage industry seems to have picked up on this trend and has recently introduced mobile luggage that converts into laptop stands that can be used at the airport, the hotel and in the car. It's often height adjustable and can be used in both sitting or standing postures.

This is good ergonomics!



Avoid hand carrying luggage

...especially the shoulder strap bags



With added security and increased baggage check-in time, travelers are hauling around ever more carry-on luggage– and the airlines are cracking down in response. While shoulder straps appear to be more convenient, they put excessive stress on the neck and shoulder that can cause pain, muscle spasms and aggravate pre-existing conditions. Buy a small, soft side combo roller/shoulder bag to alternate methods of carrying.

While the bags pictured above may look reasonable they are a potential pain!

Use wheeled luggage for heavy bags

Wheeled luggage reduces loads on the body by 80% and distributes weight and forces more evenly than hand held or shoulder-straps bags. Just change hands frequently to minimize concentrated stress on one side of the body.



Use back packs for carrying laptops & briefcases

Back packs are a very efficient and comfortable luggage for hauling small but heavy loads such as business paperwork, laptops and digital gadgets.



They distribute weight evenly on the upper back—some of the strongest muscles and most powerful structures of the body...*that's why the military uses them extensively.*



Where to find more information



Resources- ergonomics articles and tips for travel

www.macopinion.com - road warriors articles and product tips

www.dea.human.cornell.edu – ergonomics of air travel

www.spineuniverse.com - travel and back care tips

www.safety.duke.edu - ergonomic tips for laptop and travel

www.usna.edu/safetyoffice - ergonomic travel tips

www.ergoweb.com - ergonomics travel articles

www.zyworld.com - Wellness Concierge tips for travel

Sources- luggage and accessories for travel

www.flightable.com - laptop luggage stand

www.instand.com - adjustable portable laptop stand

www.relaxtheback.com - neck pillows

www.pctabletote.com - adjustable laptop stand

www.officerelief.com - laptop riser for desk and neck pillows

Also check out www.skymall.com for comfortable travel accessories and luggage