

## CHAPTER THREE

# SITTING

We sit for many reasons: to eat, to rest, to socialize — and, of course, to work at a computer. Sitting while you work has certain distinct advantages over standing:

- Sitting is stable and balanced — important considerations when your job requires you to look closely at things and perform many small tasks with your hands.
- Sitting uses less energy than standing.
- Sitting puts less stress on your hips, knees, and ankles than standing.
- If your legs are prone to swelling, sitting will exacerbate it less than standing will.

However, sitting has its disadvantages, too:

- Sitting puts more stress on your back than standing.
- It's harder to shift your body weight while seated.
- When you sit, moving your arms, legs, and head takes more effort — which causes the muscles in your neck, shoulders, and back to fatigue and cramp more quickly.

### **Becoming Aware of How You Sit**

Are you comfortable when you spend hours at your computer? Does your neck hurt? How about your shoulders? Whether you slouch or have ramrod-straight military posture, whether you cross your ankles when you type or stretch your legs straight out in front of you, the way you sit affects your entire body. The longer you sit with poor posture, the more you risk injury.

Most of us think “sitting up straight” is all there is to good seated posture. But there's actually much more to it. The best way to sit is the one that gives us the best, most comfortable way to perform a specific task. For the task of sitting at the computer, your posture needs to meet all these goals:

- You're comfortable, both at rest and while using the keyboard and mouse.
- You can move your head, arms, and legs easily.
- You can see comfortably.
- You can breathe freely — after all, breathing uses your upper body.



Watch video #3 on the CD-ROM to learn more about how you sit.



Tripod sit with lumbar support (your back against the chair).



Tripod sit without lumbar support. In both cases, your arms hang down, your chin is tucked in, and your weight distribution is the same.

Training in the MouseKeyDo™ System begins with the basics of putting your body in a chair. Instead of sitting stock still for hours at a time, you'll learn to make continuous small adjustments in your posture so you can work easily, efficiently, and comfortably.

In this chapter, we'll learn the basics of proper sitting: the tripod sit, pelvic tilt, pelvic rock, and pelvic shift. **Video #3 on the CD-ROM** includes examples, including a series of sitting awareness exercises.

## Lesson 1: Tripod sit

The first step in the MouseKey Do™ System is learning to sit unsupported — that is, without arm rests and placing your back against the back of your chair — in what we call the tripod sit. In the tripod sit, your weight is distributed among three points: your seat and your feet.

Put your hands under your seat, palms up, and feel for your “sit bones.” About 75% of your weight should be directly over these bones; imagine a helium balloon is attached to the top of your head, pulling you upright so that your tailbone has no contact with the seat of the chair. The other 25% of your weight is carried by your feet, which are apart at about shoulder width and resting comfortably flat on the floor — not crossed, stretched out in front of you, or perched on the base of your chair. Your arms hang down straight from your shoulders where they can freely swing forward and backward as if they were the pendulum of a clock. Your neck is aligned with your spine and your chin is tucked in as if you're playing a clarinet, relaxing your neck muscles. This is the recommended position when you're typing or using your mouse, as it gives your neck and shoulders the most comfort, and you the greatest freedom of motion throughout your body.

However, remember that no one stays comfortable forever in a single position. You may also want to try a supported tripod sit — that is, using the back of your chair for additional back support. Scoot back in your seat until you feel the chair's back support pushing you forward a bit. In the supported tripod sit, you lose some freedom of motion, but your spine is supported for extra comfort. You may want to move back and forth between supported and unsupported postures throughout the day based on what feels best at the time.



fig. a: Backward-tilted pelvis, slouch.



fig. b: Pelvis balanced, upright.



fig. c: Forward-tilted pelvis, hyperextended.

## Lesson 2: Pelvic tilt

When you need to bend over your desk to write or draw, or reach forward to answer your phone or pick something up from your desktop, your body shifts into the forward sitting position. Instead of bending from the waist as you probably do now, tilt your pelvis forward to shift more of your weight in front of your sit bones and onto your feet. Imagine that your pelvis is a bucket of water you're tipping so that water spills over the top. Move from your hips, not your shoulders.

When you want to lean back in your chair as you talk on the telephone, sit in a meeting, or simply relax, your body shifts into reclined sitting using a backward pelvic tilt. Tip that bucket of water backwards, shift more of your weight behind your sit bones and away from your feet, and lean on the backrest of your chair. To straighten up, don't throw your shoulders forward or straighten your back; instead, roll your hips forward so that your spine follows.

As you tilt your pelvis back and forth, notice how your body moves. When you do a backward tilt, your chest caves in, your head hangs forward, your shoulders and arms move together in front of you, and your palms face in and down. As you tilt forward again, your lower back muscles contract to keep you from falling on your face, your head tilts backward again with your chin moving up and forward. Your chest and shoulders open up, and your palms begin to turn upward.

**Pelvic tilt (above):** To move from position a to position c, tilt the pelvis forward from the sit bones and hips, not from the shoulders.

To move from position c to position a, the reverse, tilt the pelvis backward from the sit bones and hips, not from the shoulders.



**Pelvic rock:** To find comfort and balance while sitting, move the upper part of your body in a circle anchored by your sit bones.

### **Lesson 3: Pelvic rock**

Get into the tripod sit and tilt your pelvis to a spot where you feel your body is supported, with your shoulders and back relaxed and your weight supported primarily by your sit bones. You should feel light, neither slumping nor tense.

Now, imagine that your seat and pelvis are at the tip of a cone, with your head at the base. Begin to rotate from that tip, allowing the upper part of your body to move in a circle anchored by your sit bones. You may imagine a pianist swaying at the keys or even a tree blowing in the wind. Keep your neck and spine straight and your shoulders relaxed as you rotate. As your shoulders and head make bigger circles, you may want to move your feet forward or further apart to support you. Feel your weight shift off your sit bones to your thighs and the balls of your feet; your leg, back, and abdominal muscles contract and relax to keep you stable.

When you sit, you can shift your weight ever so slightly back and forth, side to side, to keep your weight distributed comfortably and keep blood flowing freely throughout your muscles and spine. Sitting is actually a series of tiny movements!

### **Lesson 4: Pelvic shift**

When you notice yourself reaching for the keyboard or mouse, your inbox, or something on the other side of the room, don't lean out of your chair. Just move your whole body, chair and all, by propelling yourself with your feet until your work is right in front of you. (Your chair should have wheels and move over the floor freely; if your chair sits on carpet, get a plastic floor mat to minimize friction.)

Reaching with your arms and shoulders contributes to upper body pain. The pelvic shift lets your lower body do the work. When you do a pelvic shift, take a moment to stretch and roll your shoulders. This will improve your posture and relax your upper body.

### **Lesson 5: Breathing and balancing**

Sit in the tripod position with your feet securely on the floor and your arms on your thighs. Relax and inhale by letting your belly and abdomen expand. Then move the breath up into your rib cage by expanding your ribs. Let your breath fill you from bottom to top, from inside out, all the way into your shoulders. Notice how your body lifts gently and your shoulders and upper chest roll out slightly, allowing you to inhale more air. As you inhale, imagine the breath reaching all the way to your fingertips and toes. As you exhale, notice how breathing deeply helps your muscles relax.

Any time you begin to feel discomfort as you type, stop typing, return to this position, and breathe deeply while focusing on using the tripod sit, pelvic tilt, and pelvic rock to adjust your posture until you're once again comfortable and balanced.

As you practice these motions individually and in combinations, notice how shifting your weight and adjusting your posture below the waist affects your movement and comfort in your upper body. As you're about to learn, you can use these lower body movements to position yourself and create momentum, shifting some of the physical effort of typing from your shoulders, neck, elbows, and wrists to the larger, stronger muscles in your hips, legs, and feet.

## **MOUSE KEY DO'S**

- Tripod sit.
- Pelvic rock, pelvic tilt.
- Tuck your chin in.
- Let your arms hang down and swing freely from the shoulders.
- For maximum comfort, face your work directly.
- Move your upper body with your lower body, not the other way around.
- Do a variety of tasks throughout the day to give your muscles a break.
- Stand up and stretch if you need to!
- Do breathing exercises to relax.

