

This section considers the pros and cons of providing armrests on office chairs.

ARE ARMRESTS NEEDED FOR OFFICE CHAIRS?

Question: Should an office chair be outfitted with armrests?

Answer: It depends on at least these factors ...

- The type of task (or set of tasks) being performed
- Potential interference with the work surface
- The design and adjustability of the armrests in question
- Preferences and characteristics of the person being fitted

ARMREST PROS

When properly fitted with the worker, the task and the workstation:

- Those with age or injury related strength or stability issues may benefit from use of armrests while entering and exiting a chair.
- Resting the weight of the arms can reduce neck and upper back muscle activity. Even if not used continuously, some people benefit from occasional or intermittent armrest use.
- Support from an armrest can improve performance for certain types of precision tasks.

ARMREST CONS

- Increased reach distance due to interference between armrests and desk/work surface/keyboard tray height and armrest height. **This problem alone often makes the use of armrests worse than better.**
- Using armrests to support body weight, rather than just arm weight.
- Potential for contact pressure on the forearms and bony parts of the elbow or wrist.
- Chair armrests often are not adequate for computing tasks because they don't have a suitable amount of surface area and range of motion to support the arms through the range of movement required for keyboard and mouse use.

QUICK GUIDELINES: WHEN ARMRESTS ARE INCLUDED

If armrests are present they should be designed such that they:

- Do not reduce access or increase reach distance to the desk/work surface/keyboard tray.

- Are adjustable through a range that can take them below or away from any work surface interference.
- Are adjustable and sized such that they can drop below a user's resting elbow height and not extend past their abdomen.
- Are adjustable and sized to be wide or narrow enough to comfortably accommodate the person's body width.
- Are easily detachable in case they create interference, are not used, or are disliked.

QUICK GUIDELINES: WHEN ARMRESTS ARE NOT INCLUDED

Situations in which armless chairs might be specifically recommended over a chair with adjustable armrests include:

- If a person has a habit of leaning (with body weight, not just the weight of the arm) on the armrests, and therefore has contact pressure and biomechanical problems.
- If the person has expressed a preference for an armless chair and demonstrates good sitting and computing habits.
- If the cost savings allows them to purchase a quality chair that fits them well in every other regard.