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“NECC Students Teach Ergonomics to City of Norfolk Staff”

Sitting up straight at your desk. Taking a break to stand and walk around. Adjusting your chair to the correct height. Paying attention to your daily work practices won't just help prevent physical stress on the body. It will also improve productivity and the quality of work done. These were just some of the principles on ergonomics that were recently taught to some City of Norfolk employees by Northeast Community College physical therapy assistant students.



Kris Kopetzky of Big Springs, demonstrates ergonomic exercises to do in the office setting. Seated are Patty Brasch and Julie Knudson, both with the City of Norfolk Police Division.

Tere Karella, instructor with the college's PT assistant program, said second year students have given office ergonomic presentations to college employees before and were happy to give tips to other groups of people in the community who may sit for hours working in front of a keyboard.

“For part of our accreditation, students have to do community outreach and education. Besides giving a PowerPoint presentation the students also demonstrate exercises and stretches that people who are at a desk for hours at a time can do,” said Karella.

Ergonomics comes from two Greek words “ergon”, meaning work and “nomos” meaning “laws”. Ergonomics as taught to people today involves the study of the relationship between the body and work elements, physical stress that the work brings on the body and creating a safe work environment.

Kris Kopetzky, a student from Big Springs, Nebraska, showed a model of the spine to a group of 15 City employees while pointing out the discs in the spine, the nerves that run through it and how the position of the head affects it.

He and fellow students, Lydia Lusk of North Platte and Shelby Paxton of Stuart, told the group how proper hydration during the work day is important to promote good lubrication of joints. They advised taking your eyes off of a computer screen periodically to give eye muscles a rest, to keep wrists in a neutral position at the keyboard and to adjust the computer monitor height to reduce strain.

Other tips to reduce stress from working at a desk for hours at a time: stand up at least once every 60 minutes; use a headset rather than hold a phone on your shoulder; organize your office to avoid unnecessary strain.

“Many of the city employees indicated through the City's Safety Committee an interest for additional workplace ergonomics training. This program from NECC is mutually beneficial to both the City and the college,” said Lyle Lutt, City of Norfolk Risk Manager.

Physical therapy assistant students at NECC receive over 600 hours of clinical labs instruction during the course of the two year program. Over 30 City of Norfolk employees took part in the training.