

## **A Summer of Forest Fires**

Everyone is always grateful for those first initial days of the warm spring weather after surviving yet another freezing winter. But as the years go by, our springs have been getting shorter and shorter. This year many countries are facing a hotter than usual spring. With countless sunny days instead of the rainy spring, our weather is quickly creating the perfect ingredients for wildfires.

What exactly causes wildfires? The three key elements in creating a fire are heat, oxygen, and fuel. With our current warmer temperatures creating the heat element, the warm weather is also drying out our vegetation and soil which provides the perfect kindling to create the required fuel. Without rain, a fire can start easily with a lightning strike, a discarded cigarette, or even an unattended campfire.

Although not all wildfires are bad. Some are intentionally controlled to help promote growth in our ecosystems by clearing out dead vegetation that prevents animals and plants from accessing the soil. However, the majority of the wildfires we've faced over the years are mainly accidental that causes a significant amount of widespread damage.

Earlier this month, several wildfires have struck Canada in Ontario and Quebec causing over 14,000 evacuations in the affected regions. According to the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre, it's reported that there are currently 417 fires actively burning with most of them still out of control. Due to these fires, a blanket of thick smoke has started to cover cities in the northeast of the US. Cities like Manhattan and Washington D.C. are currently facing the worst air quality in the world. Not only are the northeastern states affected by the smoke, but states as far south as South Carolina has been seeing their air quality become more polluted. With red skies slowly spreading across the US, we seem to be facing one of the worst years of wildfires to date.

If you live in an area that is polluted with smoke, your health could be at risk. Smoke exposure can cause a multitude of short term and long term symptoms such as cough, stinging eyes, irritated sinuses, wheezing/shortness of breath, raised pulse, and even chest pain. According to the CDC, the people who are at high risk are those with asthma, heart disease, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, pregnant women, and children.

Here are some precautions that you can take to stay safe if you reside in any of these areas:

- If you're high risk, stay indoors as much as possible
- Wear an N95 respirator mask if you have to venture outside. This will help reduce your exposure to the smoke.
- Purchase an air purifier for your house.

Wildfires are alarmingly tough to deal with for anyone, but if you keep alert, take precautions, and listen to your local authorities, you will be taking the important steps to keeping yourself and your loved ones safe.

## **My First Massage Experience**

Like most people, I have the horrendous habit of getting way too caught up in the hustle and bustle of daily life and not remembering to focus on myself from time to time. Between work and school, it seems like there are never enough hours in the day. Without setting time aside for yourself, it's very easy to become stressed and overwhelmed. Luckily, the holiday weekend gave me the opportunity for some relaxation. How did I relax you may ask? By receiving my very first massage. Something I've always wanted to do but never had any time for.

Booking the massage was an incredibly easy process. There are a few options on how to book a session. A guest has the option to book online on the LaVida Massage website, call the Center directly, use the LaVida Massage app, or even book an appointment via text. I decided to book my session online since it was the most convenient for me. After finding a day and a time slot that worked best, I received a text with my appointment confirmation and a phone number to call in case I had any additional questions. The most important information that they told me upon booking is to arrive at least 10-15 minutes early to my appointment to ensure that I have enough time to fill out some paperwork, which is exactly what I did on the day of my session.

From the moment I walked into the building, I was instantly transported to a tranquil place of healing and relaxation. From the music to the aroma, LaVida Massage does a fantastic job of creating a calming atmosphere. After warmly greeting me, the Sales Associate had me fill out a short intake form. This form is where I could list any important health information as well as the areas that I would like the therapist to focus on or avoid during the session. Although a full body massage sounded incredibly relaxing, I had my therapist focus mainly on my back and shoulders because of my long history of college drumline. After filling out the intake form, I was invited to take a seat in

the lobby while I waited for my therapist to fetch me for my session. At this point, I was already incredibly eager and excited for my massage to begin that it was hard to sit still.

Lucky for me, my therapist was quick to escort me back to the room where my session would take place. After going over my form, she took the time to answer any questions that I had. I let her know that it was my first time getting a massage. She was incredibly kind to me and told me that she would begin with a lighter pressure to help ease me into the experience. She then left to give me some privacy to remove my clothes and to prepare. The great part of getting a massage here is that she asked me to undress to my comfort level, I could keep all of my clothes on if I chose.

After situating myself on the table and getting under the sheets, my therapist came in and the session began. There are no words to describe how entirely amazing it felt. The lights were dimmed, the music played softly in the background, the table was comfortably warm – this was basically the epitome of stress relief. My therapist focused on my back and shoulders first and I could instantly feel the tension leaving my body. Eventually, she had me flip over so she could work on my arms, hands, and neck. I didn't even know hand massages existed before this, but I'm so glad that they do because it felt perfect. It wasn't long before I got lost in the calming music and just let myself go.

The entirety of the massage was so relaxing that I was really surprised when it finally came to an end. My therapist left the room once more to give me some privacy to redress. After

gathering my belongings, she met back with me to go over my session. Apparently, I have a lot of tension in my forearms and shoulders, but that's to be expected when you work at a coffee shop. She gave me some great daily stretching exercises to help manage the tension in the future. After doing the exercises for a while, I can definitely say that I feel a very positive difference. The Sales Associate at the front desk helped me choose a date next month for my next appointment and was happy to give my tip to my Massage Therapist for me. Generally, a 20-30% tip for a professional service such as this is standard.

All in all, I am more than happy with my first massage experience at LaVida Massage and I'm wondering what took me so long to schedule one. I believe that this would have been amazing stress relief during midterms or final exams when I was in college. I honestly felt so great afterward and my stress just seemed to evaporate. I can't wait for my next visit to LaVida Massage!

# **Everything You Need to Know About Office Ergonomics**

## **What is Ergonomics?**

Ergonomics is the study of people and their working environment. The study and practice of ergonomics began as a result of increasing costs that are associated with workplace injuries from the soft tissues of the body. The average worker typically spends around 40 hours a week in the workplace. With proper ergonomics practice, workers can reduce pain, injuries, and even boost their productivity in the office.

## **What are some mistakes used in the workplace?**

Whether you are working from home or in an office, we try to make our workspaces as productive and comfortable as possible since we dedicate a large period of time in them. Even though we may believe that our spaces are perfect for us, you may unknowingly be incorporating poor habits throughout the workday. Here are some of the top posture mistakes that are made:

- Not moving enough
- Hunching your shoulders
- Gazing downward for too long
- Using your couch for work if you're working from home
- Having your computer screen(s) too low
- Using your laptop on your lap
- Having your chair too low to the ground
- Not stretching enough throughout the day

## **What is the most important aspect of ergonomics?**

The most important item in your office is your chair. The chair is the top cause for back pain because many are poorly designed. When you're looking for the ideal ergonomic chair for your workspace, you should focus on the following:

- Adjustable seat height that allows your feet to be flat on the ground and your knees parallel to the floor
- A gel or memory foam cushion for the best support
- A minimum recline of 135 degrees to minimize any stress on the vertebra
- Adjustable lumbar support to reduce the stress on your back as well as your upper body
- Adjustable armrests
- Supportive material that's not overly hard but is also breathable
- A swivel chair that allows the worker to reach items on their desk without struggle

### **How can I achieve the ideal ergonomic workplace?**

The chair may be the most important item in the workplace, but it does not diminish the importance of the other components of the office. Everything in the ideal ergonomic work environment comes together to help support your body in a neutral position, reduce any discomfort, and increase working efficiency. Here are some ways that you can create the ideal ergonomic workplace:

- Your desk should be at the proper height for using your keyboard comfortably and without strain. A desk that is too high can strain your forearms. A desk that is too low can cause a strained back from hunching over your work. A few solutions to remedy a desk you already have can be as simple as attaching a keyboard tray under your desk if it's too high, or raising your chair to allow your arms to be parallel to the floor.
- A keyboard mouse that fits comfortably in your hand and that is easy to move around the mousepad without difficulty. Your mouse and keyboard should be at a comfortable length where your elbows and forearms are parallel to the floor. Test this by sitting at your desk and holding your arms naturally at your sides and then bend your elbows. They should be very slightly in front of your body but still at your side, as if you were typing, to get the proper height for your work surface.
- Your computer monitor(s) should be at a perfect height where you're not craning or bending your neck to view it. Your monitor should be at a height where your eye level is between two to three inches below the top of the screen in order to protect your eyes from any strain or fatigue. Your screen should also be about an arms length away from you at a slight angle. Try adjusting the height with a monitor stand or even by raising the monitor with any flat item such as books or empty boxes.

- When you sit down on your chair, your thighs should be straight and your knees should be at a 90° angle. You may need a footstool, or even a cardboard box, to help elevate and keep your legs to the correct angle.
- Another way of preventing eye strain is having adequate lighting for your workspace. Overhead lighting is efficient for your workstation but natural lighting is preferred. Natural light not only allows your eyes to relax a bit, but it also can boost your energy levels and your overall well-being.
- Include items that help reduce stress in your workplace. Stress can cause your muscles to tense up and to create a more negative workspace. Some things to include can be scented candles, small potted plants, pictures from home, whatever makes you feel relaxed.

### **Are there DIY ways to provide an ergonomic home office?**

A good thing to remember when it comes to working from home is to separate your workspace from your living area. Try to set up your work in a spare bedroom. A current working from home trend is creating a Cloffice which is transforming an unused closet into an organized office space. Distancing your desk from your bed, couch, and other areas normally associated with relaxation limits the possibility of blurring lines between rest and work and you gain more accountability in your own designated workspace. A standing desk does not have to cost a fortune. You can DIY a standing desk with a stack of books or boxes on your current desk. Alternatively, a taller dresser, ironing board or bookshelf will work well too. Just make sure that the keyboard and monitor are at the correct heights and distance.

### **How can I incorporate good habits in my ergonomic workspace?**

Now that you have a more efficient workspace, here are some habits that you can incorporate during your workdays to ensure that you have enough movement throughout the day.

- Try to divide your work time between sitting and standing. If you don't have a workspace that is ideal for standing, try to take short little walks around the office. Whether it's to the printer, to the kitchen, or even to a co-worker's space. Try setting yourself movement reminders.
- For every twenty minutes of staring at your computer monitors, you should spend twenty seconds looking elsewhere in order to avoid eye strain.
- Declutter your workspace and keep it organized. A good way to do this is by incorporating extra shelving on the walls to provide you with more space and storage options. Don't have room for shelving? Try using file containers, storage bins or sliding bins. A decluttered workspace provides for a more productive working environment.

- Listen to what your body needs. If your back hurts, maybe it's time to look into a better chair. If you're tired, maybe it's time for a coffee break. It's better for you and your productivity to listen to your needs instead of ignoring them.

Wherever you are working from, you shouldn't skip self-care. Follow these tips to help reduce strain on your spine and neck, and make sure to book a monthly massage appointment!