

Body matters

You've chosen the design and picked the colour for your new kitchen, but have you considered your own well-being? It's time to practice ergonomics

FEATURE BY SHARON DAVIES For stockists, turn to page 116



CHIROPRACTIC TOP TIPS

Tim Hutchful from the British Chiropractic Association has some pointers on how to achieve a healthy, feel-good kitchen

- A sink without a cupboard underneath allows you to stand closer, taking the strain off your back. If there is a cupboard, open the door and put one foot inside.
- Store heavy items at chest height to make lifting easier.
- Kneel, don't bend, when reaching down into low, awkward cupboards.
- Ensure cupboards open and close easily by rubbing with olive oil or candle wax.
- Have preparation areas where you can sit or stand at times, so the same joints are not continually bearing your weight.
- Avoid bending forward by using a recipe book stand when cooking.

Of all the rooms in the home, the kitchen is perhaps the most important. Unfortunately, it's also the room where we are most likely to strain ourselves through bad posture and poor kitchen design. It is common, repetitive tasks such as reaching up to shelves, lifting dishes out of the oven or preparing food that are the main culprits. This is where good kitchen ergonomics comes to the rescue. Ergonomics is a subject that is often neglected and, unfortunately, we can suffer as a result. It looks at how we use a space, considering our health and well-being. And by introducing good design, easy-to-use appliances and efficient layout it can make being in the kitchen safe and a pleasure. Ensure your kitchen encourages a good lifestyle – and complements you – by checking out its ergonomics.

Kitchen layout

Start by looking at the layout of your kitchen. Ideally you want the three main elements of the room – the sink, cooker and fridge – to be laid out in a triangular shape, within easy reach of each other. Otherwise known as the 'work triangle', this simple layout allows you to move from one area to the other; without walking the entire length of the room. Complement this layout with useful, well-located work surfaces, preferably on either side of the cooker and next to the sink and fridge.

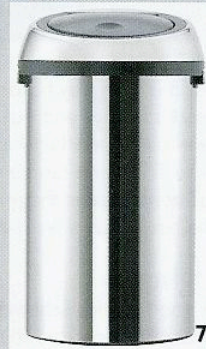
Design features

Next assess the kitchen fittings. A kitchen with ample storage and plenty of clutter-free work surfaces is most desirable. But it's not just about having lots of storage, it's having storage that's easy to access.



- 1** Hours standing by the kitchen sink puts strain on our bodies. Take it easy by installing a counter dishwasher. Available from McCord, this design is priced at £240
- 2** Bring out-of-reach items closer with one of these step stools, which fold flat for easy storage. Priced £125, from Ocean
- 3** Wooden surfaces are kind to the eyes and hard-wearing. Part of the Meson's K99 kitchen range, these units are finished in cherry wood, with matt lacquered handles
- 4** Hobs needn't be the same height as the work surface. This design by Alno demonstrates how lowering the height of an inset hob makes cooking a whole lot easier

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Cupboards should open at chest height, rather than back-breaking waist height, drawers must slide in and out smoothly, and shelves should be easy to reach. Also take into account how you use storage. For example, storing heavy casserole dishes on the bottom shelf of a cupboard or on a high out-of-reach shelf is just asking for trouble. Put frequently used items where they can be accessed easily and those used less on higher shelves.

Most work surfaces are a standard height, which is a little problematic if you're a bit taller or shorter than average. Begin by making them clutter-free and then adjust their height to suit you. This can be done by either laying a thick wooden chopping board on top of the work surfaces or by using a low kick stool. Another option, if space permits, is to

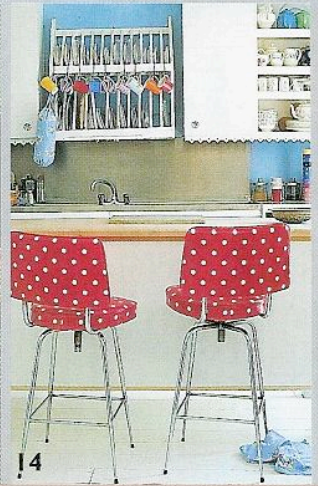
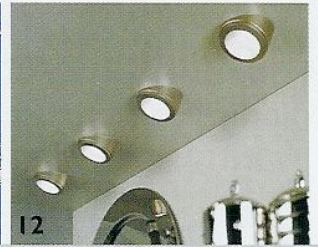
consider using a butcher's block or breakfast bar, where you can stand or sit perched on a stool. For those designing a kitchen from scratch, the best way forward is to choose kitchen units that are available in a choice of heights.

Appliances

Appliances can be particularly hazardous when it comes to back problems. Sinks are more than often too deep, forcing us to bend forwards, particularly when washing-up. One way around this is to put a trivet in the sink and then a washing-up bowl on top. But make sure you protect your clothes with an apron. Alternatively get yourself a dishwasher, preferably one that is easy loading and fits on the worktop.

Another offender is the oven. Popular in design, low-level ovens may look good ▷

- 5** These cupboards are finished in a striking shade of blue that manages to lift the whole room. Make the kitchen safe with a modern non-slip floor. Available from Amtico, this treadplate Luna flooring is £70 per sq m
- 6** Neat storage that is easy to reach helps to make cooking a pleasure. This stylishly designed overhead cupboard, with a folding flap door is available from Poggenpohl
- 7** Even waste bins can be ergonomically designed. Tall in height, the 50-litre touch bin from Brabantia stops you from having to bend down to fill the bin
- 8** An integrated fridge freezer is a useful space-saver and is kind to the back. This BE810 WH 70/30 combination fridge freezer is priced £599, available from Belling
- 9** Stocking up the larder may never be back-breaking again. Part of the Alnojet range, this full-height pull-out larder can be accessed from either side. Finished in birch, it's available from Alno



10 A kitchen with a central island unit can save time and motion running between the various different work areas. The streamlined Blonde work surface pictured is from Axiom, priced £80 per m

11 Bending over a recipe book is another cause of back pain. Eliminate backache with this stylish Hafele cookbook stand. Finished in chrome, priced £14.95, it is available from John Lewis

12 Good lighting is essential in a well-planned kitchen. These four Kes stainless steel lights, with transformer, cost £56.75 and are available from John Lewis

13 Take the pressure off your joints by laying padded, easy-to-clean flooring. This striking chequer-board design in ivory and black is available from Marmoleum. Tiles are priced at £28 per sq m

14 These funky stools have been covered with large red-and-white spotted oilcloth and give the kitchen a splash of colour; from Cath Kidston, priced at £24 per m

15 Making the most of available space is a mark of a well-designed kitchen. The Vermont sink board and drainer turns the sink into useful additional workspace and looks pretty good too. Available from McCord, it is priced at £50

but they can play havoc with your back as you lift food in and out of them. An eye-level oven is certainly a good solution here. The same can be said for fridges. A full-height larder fridge is far friendlier to the body than a waist-height version.

Lighting

A good lighting scheme in the kitchen is imperative to avoid spillages and nasty accidents. It also saves us from stooping over preparation areas, while trying to see more clearly. Avoid lighting that forms shadows over work surfaces – instead install task lighting directly above and in front of work surfaces, fixed to wall-mounted cupboards.



IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS THAT COUNT

Good ergonomics is all very well but how else can we achieve a fresh, wholesome atmosphere in the kitchen?

- Inject colour and a sense of fun into the area with brightly-coloured units and accessories. This adds style to the space and will lift your spirits.
- Put walls to work with eye-catching colours such as yellow, orange and red and add interest with an assortment of fashionable, decorative tiles.
- Disguise unsavoury odours that have a habit of invading kitchens by investing

in refreshingly spicy room sprays, such as tangerine or bergamot.

- Avoid reflective work surfaces that dazzle your eyes. Instead, opt for soft finishes or wood.
- Make sitting and standing a pleasure in the kitchen, with well-designed chairs and soft-cushioned flooring.
- Treat yourself to a new set of crockery or cutlery – change is good.

Give your kitchen the feel-good factor and see if it passes the ergonomic test.