

# History of Ergonomics and Its Modern Practice

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Office Workers - *alancleaver\_2000*

Learn where the practice of ergonomics originated and why this practice came into existence.

## History of Ergonomics

Ergonomics – the term has been tossed around for years on TV, the Internet and in the newspaper. Most people know that it has something to do with how to correctly do things to avoid injury, but what does it all exactly mean?

## The Beginning of Ergonomics

While ergonomics seems like a modern concept, it's actually quite old. Ergonomics comes from the Greek terms “ergon”, work, and “nomoi”, natural laws. While the word itself was coined in the 1850s by Wojciech Jastrzebowski, the dangers of repetitive motion stress had been well-known for over a hundred years before then.

Bernardino Ramazzini did a study in the 1700s on what he termed the “diseases of the workers”. He noticed that clerks were constantly having hand problems due to writing. He reported on carpenters getting fatigued from standing too long. He did research on a variety of professions, but always noticed similar types of problems in each. Ramazzini offered suggestions on how to reduce the instances of ill health in these professionals. These included taking breaks, changing postures and doing physical exercises. Modern ergonomists still use Ramazzini's suggestions in their literature.

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During the early 1900s and the Industrial Revolution, work was still largely dependent on the individual worker. Injuries of all types were rampant during the Industrial Revolution in every place where it happened. To augment the effectiveness of employees, job processes were improved. This became known as Scientific Management. Frederick Taylor was a proponent of this method. He believed that there was a “One Best Way” of performing tasks. This best way would help both workers and employers.

Frank and Lillian Gilbreth also helped improve a laborer’s life by standardizing materials and processes to reduce worker fatigue. Their methods allowed bricklayers to reduce the number of steps that they took in bricklaying, reducing stress and increasing their overall pace.

The real interest in worker’s safety started after World War II. Research began to take place in muscle force, lifting, heavy labor and the like. Cognitive and industrial ergonomics then came into existence. Cognitive ergonomics involves human factors, while industrial ergonomics studies the relationship between the physical attributes of the work environment and human capabilities.

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## Using Ergonomics in Modern Life

Modern ergonomic practices grew out of these two fields. Ergonomics for present day professionals basically involves arranging the workspace for maximum comfort and minimum stress. The main goal is provide equipment that works with your body as opposed to it.

In the home office, to make a space worker-friendly can be as simple as lowering a shelf for better access, freeing up room on a desk for more operational space or by just buying an adjustable chair that can be raised or lowered. People who work from home tend to work longer hours since the barrier between home and office is less concrete.

Ergonomic technology helps the home-office employee become more efficient and be more comfortable in their environment. Having a complete understanding of ergonomics and why it is used today is must for every home-office worker.

## Sources

- [Ergonomics.org](#)
- [Optergo](#)
- [EDU.UDYM.com](#)

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