

Smart Shopping for Home Furnishings



Selecting a Comfortable Chair

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Most chairs and sofas are built for people of average height and weight. The one that is comfortable for you depends partly on your body's proportions, height, and weight distribution. Therefore, a chair or sofa that provides adequate support for one person may be totally or partially inadequate for another person. When the chair or sofa fits correctly, you are comfortable and relaxed. Before purchasing a piece of furniture, be able to answer these questions concerning comfort.

- WHAT'S THE MOST COMFORTABLE SEAT POSITION?
- WHAT'S THE MOST COMFORTABLE BACK POSITION?
- WHAT'S THE MOST COMFORTABLE ARM POSITION?

WHAT'S THE MOST COMFORTABLE SEAT POSITION?

The seat can be evaluated from different perspectives: the height, depth, width, slant, and contour (see Figure 6.1, Chair Design for Comfort).

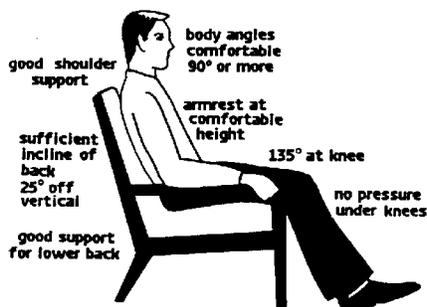


Figure 6.1. Chair Design for Comfort

The seat height is the distance from the chair seat to the floor. Your feet should reach the floor comfortably and not dangle. When the seat height is too low, your hips are below your knees, which distorts the lower back, creating a backache.

The seat depth is the distance from the front of the chair or sofa seat to the back, around 20-inches for most people. For kitchen type chairs this seat depth is around 16 inches. If you are tall or long from the knees to the hips, you may need a deeper seat. The seat depth determines to a large extent the support you get from the chair back. If the seat depth is too short, you will get back support but not knee

support. If the seat depth is too long, you will not get back support and you will get pressure under the knees. If the chair edge causes pressure under your knees, your leg circulatory system is reduced, causing swelling and pain in the lower part of the legs.

The seat width is the distance from one side of the seat to the other. The seat should be

wide enough so you can move easily without falling off either side. The bones in the middle of each buttock support the weight of the upper half of the body; therefore, the seat should be designed so that your body weight is centered on the seat, not on the sides.

The seat slant is the change in angle from the front of the seat to the back. The seat slant helps keep you from slipping out of the chair or sofa. A slant $\frac{1}{4}$ to 1 inch lower at the back will hold you in the seat.

The seat contour is the area where the seat is not totally flat. This feature is found only on hard-surface seats, not on cushioned seats. The seat contour is designed so that when you sit in the chair, the weight of the body is in the middle of each buttock and the center of the back. Check the contour of the seat for your particular body.

WHAT'S THE MOST COMFORTABLE BACK POSITION?

The chair or sofa back should give you good shoulder support for comfort. To evaluate back comfort, look at the chair or sofa back height, slant, and scoop.

The chair or sofa back height is the distance from the bottom of the chair back to the top. The back height should be high enough to support the shoulder blades. You can tell poor shoulder support when you feel pressure across the shoulder blades, which can make the neck ache. If you want to be free to use your arms for typing or sewing, you may want the back height to reach just below your shoulder blades. For relaxation, however, a back height three inches higher than shoulder blades is quite comfortable.

The chair or sofa back slant is the angle change from the bottom to the top of the back. Your body should angle 90 degrees or more for comfort, with good support at the lower back. The lower back of the chair or sofa should roll forward, and the top should angle back. Sitting without back support at the proper angle can be uncomfortable.

The back chair scoop allows your shoulder blades to roll slightly forward. If the scoop is too extreme, the shoulders roll forward to the extent of causing muscle strain.

WHAT'S THE MOST COMFORTABLE ARM POSITION?

If there are armrests, they should be high enough to rest your arms comfortably. Your forearms and elbows should be fully supported. If there is lack of elbow support, then you are generally sitting in a round-shouldered position. If the armrests are too low, your elbows do not reach the arm rests. If the armrests are too high, your shoulders are pushed up and forward, creating stiffness across the shoulders and the neck.

Possible Choices

There are many choices from which you can select furniture for sitting. The most familiar choices are bamboo, rattan, metal, plastic, upholstered, and wood furniture.

✓ QUALITY CHECKLIST

After each question, answer with a yes* or no.

1. Is the seat the right depth so that your back and knees are supported?
2. When you sit in the chair, sofa, or bench, do your feet reach comfortably to the floor?
3. Is the seat wide enough that you do not feel as if you are falling off the sides?
4. Is the seat designed so that the body weight is in the center of the seat, not at the sides?
5. Do you feel that the seat slant holds you in the chair?
6. Does the chair back height support your shoulders?

7. Is the back of the chair comfortable?
8. Does the scoop of the chair back allow your shoulders to roll slightly forward?
9. If armrests are used, are they at a comfortable height?

* If you answered all these questions with a yes, you can be assured of getting a comfortable chair.

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