

Ergonomics for Sewing and Quilting

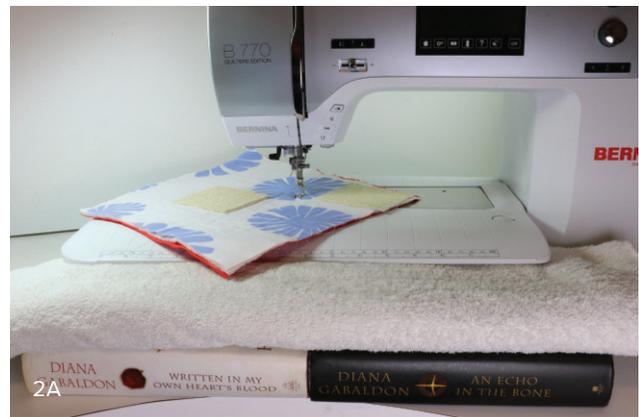
Just as you set up your sewing machine, set up your body for successful quilting—and good health! Good posture matters for comfortable, successful quilting. (Most of the following information applies to DSMs and sit-down longarms, but the general principles hold for stand-up machines as well.)

BODY POSITION

Sit comfortably. Adjust the height of your chair and table so that your arms and shoulders do not hunch up or lean down to quilt.

If your sewing machine sits down in the table with the machine bed level at the table surface, your elbows should be at table height and your forearms should rest flat on the table (1).

If your sewing machine sits on top of the table, you need to raise your forearms to the level of the sewing machine bed. You also need to support the front edge of the extension table. Place a couple of books under the edge of the extension table with a folded towel on top for cushioning. Raise your chair and rest your forearms on the books. Get a foot rest if it helps (2, 2A).



Sit directly in front of the needle so you're not leaning to one side or the other (3).



HAND POSITION

Quilt with fingertips curved (like playing the piano), rather than with your hands flat. (This is not just the piano teacher in me talking!) Curving your fingers gives you the option of quilting with just your fingertips, or with your hands, or with your whole arms, depending on the size of the design you are quilting. It is much easier to control the quilt sandwich and to quilt small designs moving just your hands and fingers. For larger work you will still *sometimes* have to move your whole arms. But if you quilt with flat hands, then you *always* have to move your whole arms. Besides making it very difficult to make small, accurate movements, this can be really tiring—partly because you’re moving a lot of weight and partly because your body is not supported on the table surface.



Hint Put on some music while you sew. It will help you relax and find your rhythm.

VISION

Have a clear sight line to the sewing area.

If you wear glasses or contacts, find the sitting distance that works best for you to see the needle. If you find yourself hunching or squinting when you quilt, try a pair of reading glasses, use a magnifier, or adjust your lens prescription so you can sit up straight and still see clearly.

Good lighting is essential. Even if your machine has a light over the needle, you’ll probably be more comfortable with more light. Set up a good task light over your work area. Daylight balanced lighting (such as an Ott light) will render the colors of fabric and thread accurately.

STAY RELAXED

Breathe and relax! The more you relax into the rhythm of your sewing, the more your lines will flow elegantly. If you feel yourself tensing up, take a deep breath!

Rest frequently—move your shoulders, shake your hands, look up into the distance to rest your vision. For this project you’ll just be doing one block a day so you don’t really have a chance to get tired out. But, when you graduate to a larger quilt, do remember to sit back, stand up, and stretch frequently. Be kind to your body—it’s the only one you get!