

Employee wants an ergonomic desk: Does ADA require that we provide it?

Q. One of our employees claims he needs an ergonomic desk for health reasons. He seems physically fit and goes “Jeeping” on the weekends. Do we have to start the whole accommodations process? — A.H., Pennsylvania

A. It would be appropriate and advisable to ask that the employee provide documentation from his health care provider about such things as what accommodations he needs to perform his job duties and for how long they would be necessary. Even if the doctor confirms that the employee needs accommodations, you aren’t necessarily obligated to agree to that specific request. You are free to determine if there’s a less costly alternative that would accommodate the employee’s medical needs.

If you suspect the employee’s work restrictions are inconsistent with his weekend activities, you can take various steps to obtain a second opinion. If you choose to do so, work with your legal counsel and a medical expert.

The bottom line: You don’t have to simply accept the employee’s request for an ergonomic desk; however, you may quickly find that alternative options are limited and just as expensive.