



# How To CHOOSE — And USE — Ergonomic Hand Tools

THIRTEEN EXPERT TIPS ON WHAT MAKES A HAND TOOL ERGONOMIC, AND HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT ONE FOR YOUR BODY AND THE JOB.



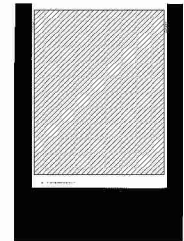
*Ergonomically* enhanced tools can include helpful features like angled handles, padded handgrips and nonslip coatings. However, no matter how impressive a tool's design is, it's almost impossible for it to be universally ergonomic since human physiques and project applications vary greatly from one to the next.

Whether you're shopping for ergonomic tools or just trying to select the right one for the job from an existing collection, the key things to consider are:

- Whether the tool fits your hand;
- How well it suits the job being done; and
- Whether it eases your work and prevents you from straining in ways that could lead to injury.

Follow these guidelines for choosing the right ergonomic hand tool for your body type and the job at hand:

1. Avoid using tools whose handles have built-in finger grooves. Finger size and placement differ from person to person. When fingers don't naturally align with grooves, excessive pressure from the raised groove edges can cause discomfort and injury.
2. Choose tools with handles that are covered in a soft material, like foam or flexible plastic. Cushioned handles are not only more comfortable, they provide a much firmer grip and cut down on slippage. Cover hard-handled tools quickly and inexpensively by adding a sleeve.
3. Ensure tool handles are free from sharp edges and seams that might irritate or cut the hands.
4. When selecting double-handed gripping and cutting tools, opt for ones with spring-loaded handles that will automatically return to the open position.
5. Prevent muscle strain by switching from standard pliers to a clamp or grip when using force to pinch or grip an object for an extended amount of time.
6. Only use tools that allow you to work with your wrist in a straight position.
7. For tasks that require force, choose single-handle tools with handle diameters that range from 1 1/4 to 2 inches. Larger handles allow fingers to wrap comfortably around the tool in a power grip, preventing slippage and reducing stress on hands, fingers and wrists.
8. For tasks that call for more precision and delicacy, opt for single-handle tools whose grips fall within the 1/4- to 1/2-inch range. The smaller-diameter handles make it easy to comfortably grip tools between the fingertips without overexerting fingers, knuckle joints or hand muscles.
9. For maximum comfort and efficiency for tasks that require more force (like gripping with large pliers, cutting wires or snip-



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ping through sheet metal), choose tools with a maximum “open” grip span of 3 1/2 inches, and a “closed” grip span no less than 2 inches across.

10. Detailed jobs that involve grasping small parts and components with pincers, tweezers or tongs are best done with double-handle tools whose grip spans range from no less than 1 inch (closed) to no more than 3 inches (open).

11. In cramped spaces, choose short-handled tools that give you the freedom to meet the target work area directly, while keeping your wrist straight.

12. When a workspace is tight but the task requires a good deal of force, opt for “power grip” tools (with handle diameters from 1 1/4 to 2 inches). This type of grip lets you finish the job in far less time, with far less physical stress.

13. The palms of your hands are full of pressure-sensitive nerves and blood vessels. To avoid damage, make sure the handles of your tools are long enough that their ends won’t press into your palms.

To measure, hold your hand palm-up, with fingers together and thumb against the side of your hand. As long as the tool’s handle is longer than the widest part of your hand (the span from the outer edge of your pinkie to the outer edge of your thumb), it’s safe to use.

*These tips courtesy of tool “eTailer” CableOrganizer.com.*

**PM**