



Leather vs Fabric Chairs

Steve MacDonald, Ergonomist

When considering both leather and fabric chairs, there is no evidence in the literature to support that one chair style is better than the other, however, here is a list of pros and cons for each style of chair based on experience.

Pros

Leather	Fabric
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ascetically pleasing (i.e. they look good).• Projected to last longer than Fabric.• Easy to clean (i.e. wipe up a quick spill).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Breathable material that allows sweat to be absorbed and can dry quickly.• Seat pan covers can come in many colours that can match office colour and design.• Can be steam cleaned/wiped with almost any type of cleaner.• Appropriate chairs have proper adjustability.• If the fabric rips, it can easily be sewn or a new chair cover can be purchased.

Cons

Leather	Fabric
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Most leather chairs are executive style and lack adjustability. This can force the user to adopt inappropriate postures and the user can be less comfortable. This is a major ergonomic issue.• Leather chairs require a lot of maintenance and cleaning to protect the leather. They also have a protective coating that needs to be regularly applied.• Many chairs are made of lower grade leather that looks like leather but does not have the proper feel that leather has (pleather).• Colour selection is limited.• Leather chairs can carry bacteria and germs, especially when not cleaned regularly. This can lead to contact dermatitis (skin rashes, hives, etc.).• Leather can crack and split. Most of the time, this cannot be repaired without a patch.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can stain easily.• May not last as long as leather.• Can rip easily as they age.



From an ergonomic and hygiene perspective, it would be best to have a fabric chair. It is important to note that the adjustability of the chair is the most important factor. Ideally, an office chair should:

- Have armrests that are adjustable in height and width
- The seat pan should be able to move up and down, tilt up and down (independent of the backrest) and it should not be too deep (the worker should be able to fit a fist behind their knee while sitting (Figure 1)). Also, if the chair is used by many users, the seat pan depth should be adjustable
- The chair should have a fabric material that is porous and allows moisture to pass through
- The backrest should be able to tilt forwards and backwards and the lumbar support should be easily adjustable to fit in the small of the back.



Figure 1: Fist-test to determine if seat depth is appropriate.

If you have any further questions regarding office chairs, please call OHCOW Sudbury.
(705)523-2330 or 1-800-461-7120
www.ohcow.on.ca/clinics/sudbury