



Preventing Injuries at the Computer

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Have you ever wondered why you have aches and pains after working at the computer all day?

Although computers are a way of life for most of us, they also present a health obstacle. When we sit at the computer all day, we put ourselves at risk for repetitive stress injuries (RSIs). RSIs are a direct result of decreased circulation to muscles, tendons and joints. Due to the decreased blood supply, the discs in the low back can also become damaged and there is greater wear and tear on the joints and ligaments.

Examples of RSIs include elbow tendonitis (tennis elbow), wrist tendonitis and carpal tunnel symptoms such as hand pain and numbness, tingling and loss of grip strength.

You've probably heard the word "ergonomics." Ergonomics is the study or science of work design. This research tells us that RSIs resulting from prolonged sitting or working at a computer can be relieved and even prevented by sitting in a properly fit chair, at a properly organized workstation and stretching hourly.

When you are experiencing pain or injury, the best thing to do is take a break from the activity or position that is causing the injury. Return to the activity gradually and make sure that your workstation is ergonomically correct.

Your physician may prescribe anti-inflammatory medication or a splint to rest the wrist joint. Your physician may also refer you to a physical therapist for a postural evaluation. A trained physical therapist can identify weak areas that would benefit from strengthening and tight areas that may need stretching.

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is the best way to prevent RSIs due to the workplace. Make sure you maintain proper body weight to decrease low back strain. By not smoking, you will increase circulation through the body and have healthier joints and tissues. Regular exercise lends to improved strength and flexibility, which is critical in maintaining posture for our daily activities, including the hours we spend in front of the computer.

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SIDEBARS:

Tips for a Smart Workstation

- ❑ Chair Height—Must be adjustable and allow feet to rest flat on the floor. Knees should be level with or slightly lower than hips. A small stool under the feet may allow feet to rest flat for those with shorter legs.
- ❑ Chair tilt—A slight forward tilt allows a more upright posture.
- ❑ Chair back—Should fit the natural arched curve of your low back and extend down to your buttocks.
- ❑ Angle of chair back—A slight recline of the chair back 10-20 degrees is optional.
- ❑ Seat depth—Recommend 103 inches between the back of the knees to the front of the seat.
- ❑ Arm rests—Always recommended. Should allow elbows to be bent to approximately 90 degrees and resting comfortably on the arm rest.
- ❑ Computer position—Should be placed directly in front of the user when possible.
- ❑ Keyboard placement—On same level as computer. Always use wrist rest allowing wrists to rest on pad. Do not hold wrists and arms up all day using your shoulders.
- ❑ Document holder—Use one to hold paperwork. Place as close as possible to screen.
- ❑ Monitor height—The top of the monitor needs to be at eye level.
- ❑ Monitor distance—Optimal is 18-24 inches from the eyes.

Work Station Relief

- ❑ Stand up from station at least every hour and stretch.
- ❑ Decrease eyestrain by trying to focus on an object which is at least 20 feet away.
- ❑ Hourly exercises/stretching
- ❑ Standing back bends—Stand from workstation, feet apart, place hands on low back and gently lean backwards holding this position for 3 seconds, repeat 10 times.
- ❑ Shoulder circles—Gently roll shoulders forward in a circular motion 10 times, repeat backwards 10 times.

- Chin tucks—Stand erect, slowly pull head straight back, keeping eyes and jaw level, hold 5 seconds, repeat 10 times
- Elbow/wrist stretch—Keeping elbow straight, grasp hand and slowly bend wrist backwards until a stretch is felt, hold 30 seconds, repeat 3 times.

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