

FOR ASPIRING COMPUTER CLIENTS

Having access to a computer that runs smoothly and quickly is almost essential in today's society. Now that you have gone to the time and effort to get your computer operating well, it is worth thinking about how to prevent unnecessary computer related injuries for yourself. Unfortunately we often take care of our machines better than our own bodies.

An integral part of daily life, computers, laptops, phones and tablets are being used for increasing periods of time, and our backs, necks and arms are being subjected to excessive strain. The most common problems we see in computer users include elbow RSI, headaches, neck and back pain. Here are our tips to prevent these problems.

Correct computer set up is the key element in minimising strain and staying pain free. When setting up your computer, make sure you adjust the following to suit your body.

- screen level - desk height - back support - screen quality (DPI)
- chair height - keyboard type - mouse type and size - document holder

Use a lumbar roll on your chair to support your lower back and keep it in good posture. The longer you sit, the more your back muscles get tired and then simply stop keeping your back upright, so your posture becomes slumped.

- Men (more than women) have broad shoulders. As a consequence, when using the keyboard, their hands are pushed towards the centre of their body with more force. Split keyboards help to keep shoulders and arms in a less stressful position.
- Take regular breaks from sitting every 20-30 minutes for 60-90 seconds. This is the most neglected but essential regime to keep your back pain free. During your break, walk around, do 10 back stretches and shoulder rolls. When you sit back down at your desk, reposition yourself into good posture.

BACK STRETCH - Stand with your feet slightly apart, your hands in the small of your back and bend backwards as far as you can. Maintain for a count of two and return to start the position. Each time, bend a little further, but *always* within a pain free range. Repeat 5-10 times.

- Avoid cracking your neck or back when they are stiff. Instead, stretch gently (5-15 times) to allow the tight muscles to relax slowly. Use heat – either hot showers or wheat heat packs - on tight muscles, to help relax them.

- Laptop computers are an increasing cause of stress for our back, neck and shoulders. The inability to adjust the screen height or keyboard level means that either our neck or our arms are being put in the wrong position. To remedy this, only use laptops when sitting up straight in a good chair with a lumbar support. Position your laptop at a height that brings the middle of the screen in line with your eye level, then connect an external mouse and keyboard lower down, to keep the arms in a good position.
- Looking at a computer screen for long periods can cause eye strain and, to compensate for the resulting poor vision, we poke our head forward. This poor posture leads to neck pain. To prevent a hunched posture do regular backward shoulder stretches. Doing these in the shower is one way to establish a regular daily routine.

To reduce eye-strain:

- Use the best quality of monitor possible. A higher resolution (measured in DPI) and a higher refresh rate will minimise eye strain.
- Set the monitor the correct distance from your eyes (an arm's length away). The middle of the screen should be set at eye level.
- A larger sized screen (>19") is recommended if: you have decreased vision (in other words, you wear glasses); you are over 40 years of age; or you are working more than 4 hours a day on a computer.
- Use larger fonts when possible to ease the strain on the eye muscles.
- Wear glasses with a focal range for computer work (see your optometrist).

To reduce the strain on the muscles of the elbow:

- Position the keyboard lower than the elbow.
- Use a mouse that suits your hand size. Your hand should fall naturally into its contours – one size does not fit all.
- Keyboards need to be cleaned as they accumulate rubbish, they require a heavier touch. To clean a keyboard, turn it upside down when the computer is off and run the edge of your hand up and down the keys – see how much rubbish falls out. To limit the accumulation of rubbish, do not eat at the computer.

