

Keyboarding all day doesn't have to be painful

By Jana Mortellaro

Spending hours typing on a computer keyboard can lead to back pain, neck pain, and repetitive-stress injuries of the fingers, hands, elbows, and wrists. But you can avoid such problems by practicing the following strategies.

Comfort basics



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Be sure to schedule regular breaks throughout the day:

- Briefly rest your eyes every 30 minutes. Spend 10 to 30 seconds looking across the room or out a window.
- Take a 10-minute computer break every two hours. Get up and move around to relieve stress and reduce muscle tension. Gently shake your hands and wrists.
- Occasionally switch to other tasks that don't involve typing.

Improve your posture

Improper posture can lead to aches and pains. To reduce stiffness, follow these suggestions:

- Sit with your back, head, and neck in a line perpendicular to the floor. Don't lean or hunch over the keyboard.
- Keep your back at a right angle to the floor and your hips, knees, and ankles at 90 degree angles, with thighs and forearms parallel to the floor when you sit. Sit with your feet flat on the floor. Use a foot rest if your feet can't reach the floor.
- Avoid leaning on your elbows on the desk or chair armrests.
- Keep your shoulders down, not hunched.

Hand and wrist protections

These tips can help reduce pain in your hands and wrists:

- Keep your wrists flat and in a straight line with your forearms.
- Learn how to type properly. Memorizing the keyboard and using the touch-type method puts less stress on the fingers than the hunt-and-peck method.
- Keep your fingers and thumbs in a slightly curved, relaxed posture, not straight and extended, while you're typing.
- Rest your hands frequently, relaxing them with your thumbs up.
- Avoid bending your wrists up and down or straining your hands from side to side at the wrists. Move your arms to reach for keys at the edge of your keyboard.
- Don't push or rest your wrists or forearms against hard desk edges; this can compress your nerves and cause or aggravate nerve problems. Consider using a wrist rest.

- Adjust your laptop computer if you're using it for an extended period. You can attach a full-size keyboard and mouse to most laptops and raise the monitor to the correct height by placing it on a stand.

Mouse musts

Gripping and clicking a mouse improperly may lead to discomfort. When you use a mouse:

- Keep it within easy reach of the keyboard.
- Hold it gently; don't grasp or tap it forcefully.
- Avoid extending or flexing your wrist back while using the mouse. Concentrate on keeping your wrists even with your hands and forearms.

Get help

If you are experiencing joint or muscle strain or have signs of repetitive hand trauma, contact your primary care provider. Prompt treatment can reduce the discomfort and speed up your recovery.

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