25 ERGONOMIC TIPS FOR COMPUTER USERS

Prolonged use of a computer keyboard and/or mouse can lead to frequent muscle aches and nerve pain unless a few guidelines are followed. Working intensively at a computer without alternating work with breaks that allow for short rests and position changes can be harmful. You can work more comfortably and safely if you incorporate the following ergonomic tips into your work style:

POSTURE AND POSITIONING ARE IMPORTANT

1. Maintain good posture when working at the keyboard. Your back curves should be maintained with the use of a chair with back support. It is important to sit properly in your chair while you work. No one sits in the proper posture at all times however sitting properly will drastically reduce your injury risk and posture is extremely important.
2. Keep your feet supported either on the floor or on a footrest when you work to reduce pressure on your low back.
3. Avoid twisting or bending your trunk or neck when working. Frequently used items (source documents and paperwork) should be positioned directly in front of you and angled upward on a copy holder when working.
4. Keep your shoulders relaxed with your elbows close to your sides in 90 degree angles when working.
5. Avoid resting your forearms or elbows on the hard surface or edge of your table/desk. Pads and/or wrist rests can be used to protect your elbows if necessary.
6. Elbows should be positioned at approximately 90 degrees when working in order to keep a relaxed position at the keyboard. A height adjustable keyboard tray is beneficial and will allow easy height adjustment. Proper keyboard/mouse height and straight wrist position could require a slight negative tilt (front of keyboard higher than back) when working in upright positions.
7. Your wrists should be in a neutral or straight position when keying or using a pointing device or calculator. Wrist rests can assist you in maintaining a neutral position when used properly during pauses. Float your arms above the keyboard and wrist rest when keying while maintaining a straight wrist. Avoid planting your wrists on the table or wrist rest. This can result in bending the wrists either up and down or side to side.

YOUR WORK PACE

8. Work at a reasonable pace.
9. Take frequent rest breaks during the day. These breaks can be brief and should include stretches for optimal results. If possible, take a 1 or 2 minute break every 30-45 minutes. Take a 5-10 minute break every hour. Every few hours, Try to get up, move around and do an alternative activity every one to two hours.

YOUR WORK TECHNIQUE

10. Reduce the number of repetitive motions you complete when working. Keystrokes can be reduced with the use of macros or software programs allowing "sticky keys". Use of scroll locks and keystroke combinations can reduce pointing device movements.
11. Alternate tasks to make changes in your working position to avoid making the same movements for prolonged periods of time.
12. Keep your fingers and knuckles relaxed when working at the keyboard.
13. Never hold a pen or pencil in your hand when keying.
15. Avoid holding your pointing device tightly. Your hands and fingers should be relaxed.
16. Rest your eyes by refocusing on distant objects intermittently when working.

YOUR WORK ENVIRONMENT

17. Avoid excessive reaching when working at the computer. Your keyboard, pointing device, files, telephone and other frequently used items should be within easy reach.
18. Use a keyboard tray to properly position your keyboard and pointing device at the proper height.
19. Use a document holder positioned in line with your monitor and keyboard to position copy or reference materials. It can also be placed below your monitor.
20. When writing at the computer, avoid excessive reaching over the keyboard or work materials. A sturdy document holder can double as a writing surface if appropriately positioned.
21. Position the monitor so that the viewed part of the screen allows you to keep your neck in a neutral or straight position. The monitor should be centered directly in front of you. The top of the computer screen should be at about eye level, so that you are looking at it with a slight downward gaze.
22. Position your monitor to eliminate excessive glare. Avoid reflections from windows or overhead lighting.
23. Customize your computer by using your software. The screen font, contrast, pointer size, speed, and color can all be adjusted to maximize your comfort and efficiency.

YOUR LIFE STYLE

24. Aerobic exercise will help to sustain strength, improve cardiovascular conditioning, and counteract the strain of sedentary computer use.
25. Routine use of non-prescribed medications or wrist brace is NOT recommended. If you begin to develop symptoms, seek further information or see your physician. Slight changes made early can avoid future complications in many cases!