

Everyday Safety

Tailgate Talks

Workstation Ergonomics

A lot of us spend part of the day at a computer. Today, due to COVID-19, some of us are spending a lot more time at a computer. But if we aren't careful, that desk and monitor can hurt us, just as surely as lifting with your back or slipping on a wet surface.

TAKE CARE OF YOUR MUSCLES!

The first step is to keep moving. Hold your arm out straight for 60 seconds, and see how quickly it gets tired. That burn is lactic acid building up in your muscles, and it's the same thing that happens to your neck, shoulders and back after 6 hours at a desk. The key is to do something before you start experiencing discomfort. Movement is key and "locking" any part of your body into one position can be detrimental; so plan to, get up, walk around, stretch, roll your shoulders, anything to promote circulation and reduce lactic acid buildup.

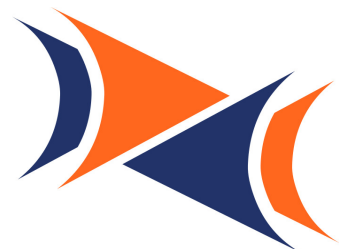


TAKE CARE OF YOUR JOINTS!

If the wrist is not maintained in a "neutral" position during prolonged computer use, operators may suffer Repetitive Stress Injuries (RSI), such as Carpal Tunnel Syndrome. Neutral, in this case, means the wrist must not be bent up or down, to one side or the other, while fingering the keys or using the mouse. In very simple terms, a bent wrist can "pinch" nerves or tendons in the wrist over time, causing damage and chronic pain. "Neutral" also applies to other parts of the body, which should be kept in the least stressful working position-with minimal effort needed to hold them there.

What to do about work position problems? Raise, lower or re-position your keyboard, to keep your wrist in a neutral position and your elbows positioned close to your body. Obtain a comfortable hand or wrist support that helps achieve the same goal. Locate the mouse close to the keyboard, so you won't have to reach out, or arrange your work area so your working forearm rests on the surface of the desk. If you don't use the numeric pad often, consider a compact keyboard that moves the mouse closer.

Hanover Testing Labs



Raise the level of the monitor so your head rests squarely on your shoulders, and your neck and upper back muscles won't strain to hold it erect. Put the main monitor perpendicular to the midline of your body. Get acquainted with your chair--should it be raised or lowered? Use one of the many available "ergonomic" checklists to help you evaluate your workstation.

Workstation layouts and individual body types are all uniquely different, so there is no single, magic prescription. There may not even be a single solution for you. Again, movement is key, staying in one position for long periods of time creates stress points. Try switching mouse hands at lunch or using a sit/stand desk. There are a variety of solutions to help avoid muscle fatigue, stress and pain. Take inventory of both your body and workstation to see what works best for you.

Don't wait until it hurts to make a change. Recovery from RSI is a long, slow process, especially if you can't stop the activity that caused the injury in the first place.

Resources:

Princeton University Ergonomics and Computer Use Webpage

<https://uhs.princeton.edu/health-resources/ergonomics-computer-use#rsi>

Cornell University Ergonomics Website

<http://ergo.human.cornell.edu/cuergoguide.html>



