Why computer ergonomics?

Many people spend hours a day in front of a computer without thinking about the impact on their bodies. They physically stress their bodies daily without realizing it by extending their wrists, slouching, sitting without foot support and straining to look at poorly placed monitors. These practices can lead to cumulative trauma disorders or repetitive stress injuries, which create a life-long impact on health. Symptoms may include pain, muscle fatigue, loss of sensation, tingling and reduced performance.

Adapt Laptops

Laptop computers are not ergonomically designed for prolonged use. The monitor and keyboard are so close together that they cannot both be in good positions at the same time. For prolonged use, it’s best to add a separate monitor and keyboard. The laptop can be placed on books so the top of the screen is at eye level, then use an external keyboard so that your elbows can rest at 90° by your side.

Modify Your Body Mechanics

Do you wear eyeglasses? Make sure they fit properly to avoid tilting your head. Type with light strokes, and try to keep your muscles relaxed. Sit “tall,” aligning your ears, shoulders and hips. When you sit, think about making yourself an inch taller. Switch hands when using a mouse, if you are able. Completely rest your wrists during breaks, including taking your hands off the mouse.

Adjust Your Work Patterns

Reduce prolonged computer time whenever possible. Break work into smaller segments and switch between tasks that use different motions. For example, alternate use of mouse with reading and searching the web.

Move!

Movement has many benefits: it relaxes tissues, lubricates joints and prevents stiffness, improves circulation, reduces fatigue, and builds stamina. One study showed that heavy computer users who successfully avoided computer-related pain moved every 7 minutes. At least every 10 minutes, take a short (10-20 second) break. Take your hands off the keyboard and move! Every 30-60 minutes, take a brief (2-5 minute) break to stretch and/or walk around.

Keep fit

Physical fitness can help you avoid and treat problems related to computer use. Build your stamina with exercises for strength, flexibility, and cardiovascular health.

When to get medical advice

See a medical provider if you experience: Constant pain, numbness, weakness, other problems that interfere with daily tasks

Reference: uhs.umich.edu/computerergonomics