

Computers – Helpful or harmful?

Since the dawn of computers, there have been ongoing complaints and problems develop in the people who use them regularly.

Many users will at some point report such problems as irritable eyes, sore necks, shoulders, upper and lower backs, wrist and elbow pain. Janice Webber, PT, owner of A Body in Balance Therapy Centre, remembers doing a college paper for our research on the newest problem in health which was the aches and pains attributed to long term daily computer work. That was over 20 years ago and the problems still exist.

Being a skilled and knowledgeable provider of holistic physiotherapy, Webber knows there's good news because there are easy things to do about this on the preventative side. She offers some great point and useable tips for those of you working on computers daily.

- The body does not do well doing the same activity for long periods of time. It does not matter if you are sitting or doing hard manual labour. The body needs break time or variation in the work to be the most efficient and productive.
- You can do quite a lot to reduce the ongoing strains that happen from overuse. One of the most important is being mindful of using good posture while on the computer. If you could see yourself in a mirror, you might look like you are going to launch yourself into the computer. You have a slumped back, head that is set with your chin poking forward, rounded shoulders. Basically look like you have collapsed.



Notice, the woman in the picture, she has a few concerns that may lead to person health and productivity problems, or what has become known as “presenteeism”

Can you identify the areas to fix up?

- Check her arm position
- Look at where her screen is set
- Take note of her head position

As she continues to type, she will start to notice tension in her neck, shoulders, arms and wrists.

Here are the answers;

- Her hands are higher than her elbows and as a result she may get soreness in her wrists.
- She is sitting with her head forward from her shoulders, and over the day she may become bothered and distracted by fatigue and pain in her neck and shoulders.

If this is you, what should you do?

First fix up your actual workstation. What you want is the following:

1. Computer screen set so the middle is about eye level.
2. Keyboard is set so the elbows are relaxed at about 90 degrees.
3. A comfortable chair so you can sit against it back and move the whole chair in close to your keyboard.

Second, if possible, fix up your workday by:

1. Schedule yourself with a variety of tasks that take 20-60 minutes to complete at the most.
2. Schedule breaks about every 30 minutes from the computer. Often the programs currently used can have an interval break set to remind you to do this.
3. During the breaks, do neck motions, shoulder rolls, back and trunk stretches. Get up from your chair and move around.

Third, what do I do if I am already having problems?

If you are already having neck or back pain, upper back strain, wrist and hand problems, have these problems assessed. You can see a licensed physiotherapist who will identify and treat your needs properly. You can get information on how to better set up your work station. The first step is to get your pain treated and ensure that you know how to deal with the causes of it.

Where do I go from here?

You can get started on the road to recovery by calling A Body in Balance Therapy Centre at 469-3214 in Dartmouth or check online at www.abodyinbalance.ca.