

Postural Issues

By Jessica Pennington, PT

Have you ever been sitting at your desk, staring at your computer and began to feel an ache in your neck or back? Or perhaps your fingers began to tingle or even became numb. Many aches and pains are created by poor positioning of the body while sitting at a computer or work station. These positions are often held for sustained periods throughout the work day. Rearranging your workstation to be more ergonomically correct may relieve your aching back and make work a little more enjoyable, or at least less painful!

To begin with, you need a comfortable chair. It is best to have a flat surface chair that is firm and not too cushioned. Your feet should be able to rest flat on the floor. With your back against the chair, you should not feel pressure against the back of your knees. When your back is flexed, or bent forward it is at the most risk for injury to the discs that cushion the segments of your spine. For this reason, your chair should be slightly reclined or your knees should be slightly lower than your hips.

To avoid neck pain you must arrange your computer monitor so that you are not looking too far down or up to view the screen, you should also not have to reach for your mouse. Positioning your monitor at eye level to allows your eyes to focus on the monitor with your neck in a comfortable position. Sitting at least 25 inches from the monitor prevents eye strain. If the monitor is closer than 25 inches the eyes have more difficulty focusing on the screen. Lighting is also important to avoid the headaches computer work often causes. Indirect lighting, as well as tipping the monitor so the top is farther away than the bottom decreases the glare on the screen.

Another issue with computer work is repetitive or cumulative use. This is most often seen in the wrists, causing carpal tunnel or tendon inflammation. To avoid this position your wrist in a neutral position, or half way between the extremes of each direction of motion. In this position tissues are least likely to be injured. Signs that you need to adjust your positioning include pain, numbness and tingling.

In the end, proper positioning at your desk is determined by your comfort, and your ability to complete your work without pain.

Please be sure to consult your physician regarding any of the symptoms discussed or for any medical problem.