

Self-Care for the Forearms

Tips to Save Your Neck and Shoulders

Tips for Relieving Strain at Your Desk

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Tips to Save Your Wrists

SELF-CARE FOR THE FOREARMS

If you are having discomfort in your forearms, these tips may help reduce your pain and prevent further injury. Try them out, then choose one or two to focus on for several weeks before adding more.

1. Support your forearms when you can, but do not rest them or your wrists on anything while typing.
2. Don't pound on the keys; use a light touch.
3. Hold the mouse lightly as if you were cradling a small bird; don't grip it hard.
4. When typing, keep all your fingers and your thumb softly curved. If you tend to keep your pinkie finger raised or stiff, begin trying to relax it to avoid injury.
5. Take mini-breaks every few minutes. Stop, let your arms hang to your side, shake them out, and take several full breaths.
6. Stretch frequently. Hold your arms out in front of you, and bend your wrists one way and then another. Ask your massage therapist for specific stretches and self-massage techniques for the forearms and wrists.

TIPS TO SAVE YOUR NECK AND SHOULDERS

If you have pain or discomfort in your neck and shoulders, try these tips at work to reduce pain and prevent possible injury. Try these out and see which ones you like. Then focus on those for a week or two until they become habit. After mastering those, you may want to add another “good” habit.

1. The keyboard should be close enough to you that you don't have to stretch forward to reach the keys.
2. Avoid reaching far forward or twisting behind you to reach for things. Stand up, or turn and move close to the article you need.
3. Your mouse should be close to the keyboard where you don't have to reach to use it.
4. Keep your upper arms close to your sides, hanging straight down. Let your shoulders remain relaxed, not rigid.
5. Keep your head aligned with your spine. Relax your neck and imagine your head floating toward the ceiling.
6. Don't forget to take frequent rest and stretching breaks.

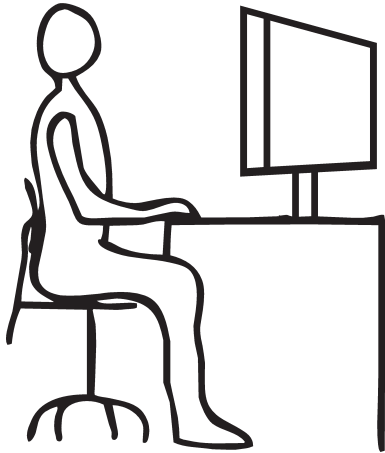
TIPS FOR RELIEVING STRAIN AT YOUR DESK

1. Consider eliminating some of the repetitiveness of your work. Can you rotate jobs with your fellow workers? Combined with better workplace design, this can allow you to engage different muscle groups than just your typing muscles. Cut back your computer time if possible. This may mean reducing your recreational computer usage.
2. Don't overlook stretching. Take breaks to move and stretch every hour or so. Stretch your forearms by bending your wrists forward and backward and by circling your wrists. Stretch your neck forward and from side to side. Circle your shoulders forward, up toward your ears and back.
3. Take mini-breaks several times an hour. Stop, let your arms hang to your side and take several full breaths.
4. Keep your arms and hands warm. Cold muscles and tendons are more at risk for overuse injuries.
5. And, finally, imagine breathing into your arms, neck and shoulders as you work. Rigidity is not the goal. Instead, focus on staying flexible and relaxed, even as you work.

RESOURCE

Repetitive Strain Injury: A Computer User's Guide. Pascarelli, Emil M.D., John Wiley and Sons, 1994.

POSITIONING YOURSELF AT YOUR DESK



First, make sure your workstation is set up correctly. Here's a checklist.

1. Your chair and keyboard should be set so that the thighs and forearms are parallel to the floor.
2. The keyboard height should ensure that the wrists are straight and level.
3. The keyboard should be close enough that you don't have to stretch forward to reach the keys.
4. The mouse should be close to the keyboard where you don't have to reach to use it.

Now check your body position.

1. Keep your hip, knee, and ankle joints open slightly (90 degrees or more).
2. Keep your head aligned with your spine.
3. Keep your upper arms close to your sides, hanging straight down.
4. When typing, your wrists should be relaxed, not be bent up, down, or to the sides.

RESOURCES

Repetitive Strain Injury: A Computer User's Guide. Pascarelli, Emil M.D., John Wiley and Sons, 1994.

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety website:
www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/ergonomics/sitting/sitting_position.html

BACKPACKS AND YOUR CHILD

Pediatricians, physical therapists and massage therapists are seeing more young patients complaining of neck and back pain due to an overloaded backpack. The American Academy of Pediatrics says a backpack should never weigh more than 10 to 20 percent of a student's body weight. Even so, your child should have a well-fitting backpack and use it correctly to avoid discomfort and injury. For instance, when bending down, it is important to bend at the knees instead of the waist if you are wearing a backpack.

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILDREN STRATEGIZE

Do your children have a locker where they can store books they're not using? Maybe they can make more frequent locker stops between classes. Talk to their teachers if necessary to explain why they may be late by a minute or two. Must they carry all their books every day? Some schools are providing two sets of textbooks so they can keep one at home and one at school. Ask about this option.

WEIGHT AND PROPER FIT

When your children put on their backpacks, notice if they are leaning forward. If so, it is too heavy. Go through the packs to see what can be left at home or school. Then work with your children in adjusting straps and settling the pack properly on the body. If it still is not working, consider purchasing a better pack.

HOW TO CHOOSE A PACK

Some children like pulling a pack on wheels, which really gets the weight off the back. Another option is an individually fitted internal frame backpack designed to make packing easier on the body. Hip and chest straps like the ones on hiking backpacks can take the weight off the upper back and shoulders. The shoulders and back should be padded for comfort. The shoulder straps should be worn on both sides and tightened, so that the pack is held close to the body.

IF YOUR CHILD IS IN PAIN

If your daughter or son already has problems, see your health practitioner right away. Also, one of the best known benefits of massage is in helping to relieve muscle spasms and improve posture. Massage will have limited effects, however, unless other changes are made.

TIPS TO SAVE YOUR BACK

The muscles, ligaments and discs of your back do a big job, supporting your spine and moving the weight of your body. Good posture, exercise and correct body mechanics help keep it flexible and strong. Massage can help with posture by stretching shortened muscles and fascia (the connective tissue that surrounds your muscles and other tissues), freeing movement around the joints, and relieving muscle contractions that can pull you out of alignment.

Help protect your back by moving with a little thought. Here are some tips to help you move correctly.

1. Spread your feet shoulder-width apart for stability when moving or working. Stand evenly on your two feet.
2. Practice feeling your center of gravity in your abdomen. Many people try to move from their upper bodies, which is less efficient than moving from your pelvis, hips, and abdomen. Practice strengthening exercises for your abdomen. Take a class or ask for advice from an exercise instructor or specialist.
3. To pick up a load, stand close to it. Squat and use your legs to lift it, keeping your back upright and the object close to your body. Avoid twisting as you lift.
4. Kneel down on one knee to retrieve something from the floor.
5. When reaching for an object overhead, keep your shoulders and hips facing it—don't twist.

TIPS TO SAVE YOUR WRISTS

If you are having trouble with pain or discomfort in your wrist area, consult a physician or ask a massage therapist help you assess if muscle tension is contributing to the pain.

If you work at a desk, you may want to look at your work set-up and use these suggestions to reduce pain and avoid more serious injury. If your company has an ergonomics department, ask them to help you change your work station and body posture to work more safely.

1. Your keyboard height should ensure that your wrists are straight and level, never bent back. If you can't adjust your table height to accommodate this, you may want to move the keyboard into your lap.
2. When typing or using a mouse, your wrists should not rest on anything, and should not be bent up, down, or to the sides. Keep your hands relaxed hovering slightly over the keyboard and the middle knuckle aligned with the center of the wrist.
3. Move your hands using your whole arms instead of resting your wrists on something, and stretching your fingers to hit the keys. Move your hand to hit function keys instead of stretching to reach them. This may take some getting used to, but can help a great deal in preventing pain and injury.

REST AND STRETCHING

When you stop typing for awhile, rest your hands in your lap or let your arms hang to your sides. Take a moment to shake them out and enjoy the refreshed energy moving through them.

It may make a big difference if you take breaks to stretch. Bend your wrists forward and backward and circle them in both directions. Make tight fists and relax them 10-20 times. Ask your massage therapist for stretches specifically for the forearms. Set up a reminder chime on your computer or some other reminder to take frequent stretching breaks.

RESOURCE

Repetitive Strain Injury: A Computer User's Guide. Pascarelli, Emil M.D., John Wiley and Sons, 1994.