



Body Awareness Physical Therapy

The Body Beat

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Repetitive Strain Injuries

A Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) can occur from a variety of occupations and leisure activities. In fact, any activity that requires continuous motion can place prolonged stress on a joint, causing pain or loss of feeling. Some common examples include shoulder bursitis, lateral epicondylitis (tennis elbow), and trigger fingers.

These conditions involve inflammation of either a tendon or bursa near a tendon. In the case of tennis elbow, the tendon may even sustain micro-tears due to the forceful and repeated bending and twisting of the wrist.

Perhaps the most common RSI is Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, a cumulative trauma that results from repetitive motion of the hand and wrist. Many patients experience pain after prolonged typing or overuse of the computer mouse or trackball.

The wrist region is shaped like a tunnel with the tendons of the fingers and median nerve passing through. Overuse of these tendons or constant overstretching of the wrist can cause swelling, thereby compressing the nerve. Consequently, hand strength and sensation are compromised.

Although Carpal Tunnel Syndrome is a rising epidemic among computer users today, most wrist and hand pain can be attributed to poor postural position and strength of the shoulders and upper back. In fact, many patients report symptoms in their neck and shoulders even though their hands seem to be the primary region of pain or numbness. The symptoms of RSI can vary depending on the joint involved. Common symptoms include:

- Tenderness, stiffness, and pain in the neck, shoulder, upper back, elbow and hands.
- Tingling, coldness, numbness, or swelling in the hands or forearms.
- Clumsiness or loss of strength and coordination in the hands.
- Sudden locking or freezing of fingers, hands, wrists, or elbows.
- Sleepless nights due to pain and discomfort.

There are several ways to prevent the pain associated with RSI. Maintaining correct posture is the first step. This should be done in conjunction with setting up your workstation properly. Ergonomic

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equipment will not prevent pain if you are poorly positioned (see page 2).

Regardless of the activity, avoid slouching or repetitive motions that require awkward reaching or bending. If you are typing on a computer, wrists should be maintained in a straight and level position. You may use a palm rest to help maintain this position. Rest is the most important aspect in preventing pain. Although maintaining postural position may be difficult, a few moments of shifting positions and stretching between long periods of work will save you from developing pain and dysfunction.

Physical therapy plays a vital role in the recovery of RSI. Our goals include alleviating pain and inflammation as well as developing a program consisting of stretches and stabilization exercises specific to the demands of your activity or job. See page 2 for our newest graduate of Carpal Tunnel Syndrome.

Q'N'A

Your Questions answered by the Licensed Physical
Therapist of Body Awareness Physical Therapy

Q. What is the best way to sit at my computer?

A. Just follows these few steps:

STEP 1: Your Chair

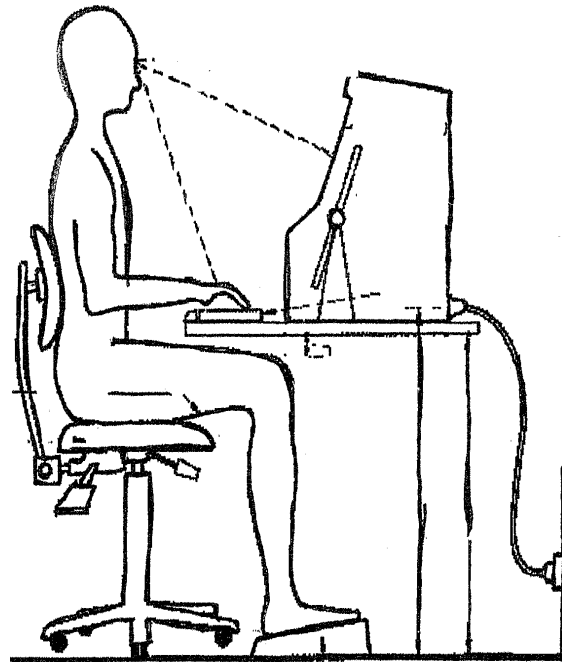
- ◆ Push hips back against the chair, sit upright.
- ◆ Adjust seat height so feet are flat and knees are equal to or lower than your hips (90 degrees is best).
- ◆ Adjust back support to support the small of the back.
- ◆ Adjust any armrests so that shoulders are relaxed.

STEP 2: Your Monitor

- ◆ Center directly in front of you, 18"-24" away, and above the keyboard.
- ◆ Top of monitor is 2-3" above eye level.
- ◆ Keep viewing documents directly in front of you, between the monitor and keyboard.

STEP 3: Your Keyboard

- ◆ Position most-used section of keyboard directly in front of you.
- ◆ Keyboard height should allow your shoulders to be relaxed.
- ◆ Wrist pad should allow wrists to remain straight and level.
- ◆ Use your arms to move hands when you type, don't stretch your fingers to the keys.



BODY AWARENESS GRADUATE OF THE MONTH

Graduate of the Month: Antionette Peterson

Antionette began physical therapy after carpal tunnel release surgery on both wrists due to loss of strength and sensation in her hands.

"The feeling and strength I've attained in both hands have occurred so quickly because all of you at Body Awareness are so conscientious and efficient."

Antionette's therapy not only included stretching and strengthening of her hands, but also a stability program for her shoulders. We also addressed the mobility of her neck and upper back.



Community Corner

BODY AWARENESS NOW OFFERS MASSAGE SERVICES!!!

We now have a **Licensed Massage Therapist** on staff to work out all your aching muscles. Services include: **Relaxation, deep tissue, therapeutic, and pregnancy massage.** Mention this newsletter and receive a **10% discount** on your first massage session!

**Good through September 15, 2003.
Please call for an appointment.**

Have a question for our **Q’N’A** column or a suggestion on what you would like to see in the *Body Awareness Body Beat*?

Please contact us at...

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Healthy Hints

To prevent a Repetitive Strain Injury...

- Take a break from working on the computer every 20 to 30 minutes and stretch.
- Remember to stretch *both* your wrists and neck!
- When working on the computer, switch to reading glasses instead of bifocals. Looking over the top of bifocals leads to increased neck extension and poor posture.



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