



Easy Ways to Ensure Keyboard Comfort

from Vitality

Spending hours typing on a computer keyboard or typewriter can lead to back pain, neck pain and repetitive-stress injuries of the fingers, hands and wrists.

You can avoid such problems by practicing the following strategies.



COMFORT BASICS

- Take regular breaks throughout the day. Briefly rest your eyes every 30 minutes. Spend 10 to 30 seconds looking across the room or out a window. Take a 10-minute break every two hours. Get up and move around to relieve stress and reduce muscle tension. Gently shake your hands and wrists. Periodically stand up and stretch your whole body.
- Occasionally switch to other tasks that don't involve typing.

IMPROVE YOUR POSTURE

Improper posture can lead to aches and pains. To reduce stiffness, follow these suggestions:

- Sit with your back, head and neck in a line perpendicular to the floor. Don't lean or hunch over the keyboard.
- Keep your back at right angles to the floor and your thighs and forearms parallel to the floor when you sit.
- Avoid resting your elbows on the desk or chair armrests.
- Keep your shoulders down, not hunched or pulled up toward your head.

HAND AND WRIST PROTECTIONS

These tips can help reduce pain in your hands and wrists:

- Keep your wrists flat and in a straight line with your forearms.
- Learn how to type properly. Memorizing the keyboard and using the touch type method is more effective and puts less stress on the fingers than using the hunt and peck approach to typing, in which you use awkward stretches to reach the keys.
- Keep your fingers and thumbs slightly curved, not straight and extended, while you're typing.
- Rest your hands frequently, relaxing them with your thumbs up.
- Avoid bending your wrists up and down or stretching your hands from side to side at the wrists. Keep hands and wrists in a straight line. Move your arms to reach for keys at the edge of your keyboard.
- Don't push or rest your wrists or forearms against hard desk edges; doing so can compress your nerves and cause or aggravate nerve problems.

- Do hand stretches before starting work and during short breaks.
- Don't rest the heels of your hands on the keyboard.
- Adjust portable equipment, such as a laptop computer, if you're using it for an extended period. You can attach a full-size keyboard and mouse to most laptops and raise the monitor to the correct height by placing it on a stand.

MOUSE MUSTS

Gripping and clicking a mouse improperly may lead to discomfort. When you use a mouse:

- Keep it within easy reach of the keyboard.
- Hold it gently; don't grasp or tap it forcefully.
- Avoid extending or flexing your wrist back while using the mouse. Concentrate on keeping your wrists even with your hands and forearms.

GET HELP

See your supervisor or a doctor if you develop any of the following symptoms. Prompt treatment can reduce your discomfort and speed your recovery.

- Tingling or numbness in the fingers
- Aching in the thumb
- Burning pain from the wrist to the fingers
- Change in touch or temperature sensation
- Weakness of grip or inability to pinch
- Swelling of hand and forearm.

Improving Your Workspace Ergonomics

Workspace discomfort can lead to aches and pains in your back, neck and muscles and general fatigue that increases your stress.

You can improve your work-space comfort by making these simple changes:

- Adjust your computer. Set the computer so you look slightly downward at the screen. Typing materials should be at eye level.
- Improve lighting. Fine-tune your workspace lighting with a desk lamp that allows you to adjust the light angle.
- Reduce glare. Reposition your computer terminal so it's perpendicular to a window. Use an inexpensive, glare-reducing screen that attaches to the terminal if you can't reposition your computer.
- Add a footrest. Raising your feet and legs makes sitting more comfortable, helps relieve pressure on the back and legs and improves circulation.

- Get oriented. Adjust the chair height so your feet rest flat on the floor. Be sure the front edge of the seat doesn't create excessive pressure behind your knees. Sit in a slightly reclined position and keep the angle between your torso and thighs at 90+ or more.
- Get support. A chair with a seat and back contoured to your body will reduce muscle strain by maintaining the proper S-shaped curve in your spine. It is particularly important to support the spine's lower-lumbar region by adjusting your chair or adding a back support.
- Position your arms. Position the seat, armrest, work surface, keyboard, wrist and/or palm rest so your arms are parallel to the floor and your wrists are straight. Make sure your shoulders and neck are relaxed.
- Place your keyboard directly in front of you so you don't have to twist your body to reach it.
- Keep your mouse within easy reach of the keyboard.
- Position the computer monitor or documents you're typing from directly in front of you and an arm's length away.

Exercises for Preventing and Treating Workstation Discomfort

The following exercises can help you relax your hands and wrists if you work on a typewriter, computer or other keyboard machine. Do the exercises before starting work and during breaks throughout the day.

HAND-STRETCHING EXERCISES

Palm Press: Make a loose fist, palm up. Gently press your other hand against the fist. Resist the force for five seconds, keeping the wrist straight. Repeat with the other hand.

Finger Stretch: Rest your forearm on a table's edge. Grasp that hand's fingers with your other hand and gently bend back the wrist. Hold for five seconds. Repeat with the other hand.

Hand Press: Gently press one hand against a firm, flat surface, stretching your fingers and wrist. Hold for five seconds. Repeat with the other hand.

Fist Clench: Clench your fist tightly and release, fanning out your fingers. Repeat five times with each hand.

NECK AND SHOULDER WORKOUT

The following stretches can improve your body's circulation and relieve muscle stress and tension. You can complete all the exercises in three or four minutes, or you can take just a minute and do one or two exercises.

Head Clasp: Clasp your hands behind your head and pull in your shoulder blades until you feel the stretch. Hold for five to ten seconds and relax. Repeat five to ten times.

Shoulder Stretch: Reach both arms straight back with your palms facing down and hold for five seconds. Bend in arms at the elbows, fingers pointing straight ahead, and hold for five seconds. Repeat five to ten times.

Chin Tuck: Tuck in your chin, count to two, then release. Repeat five to ten times.

Chest Stretch: Entwine your fingers behind your back, palms facing in. Raise and straighten your arms. Hold for five to ten seconds. Repeat five to ten times.

Neck stretch: Drop your chin to your chest and count to five, then roll your head to the right so your ear rests on your shoulder (try not to raise your shoulder). Count to five again, then repeat to the left.

Shoulder shrug: Sitting tall, lift your shoulders as high as you can, then press them down as if a pair of hands were pushing them down. Repeat three times.

Shoulder circles: With your arms at your side, rotate both shoulders in full circles: up, back, down and forward.

BACK AND HAMSTRING WORKOUT

Try these stretches for the lower body:

Mid-back stretch: Push your chair back from your desk so you have some space. Interlock the fingers of your hands, turn your palms outward and extend your arms forward as far as you can. Keeping your back straight and arms parallel to the desktop, turn your shoulders to the right and return to the center. Turn your shoulders to the left, then return to the center.

Lower-back fold: Extend your arms in front of you and lift them slowly straight over your head as you inhale deeply. Exhale, letting your arms, head and shoulders curl down and dangle toward the floor. Curl back upward, slowly and gently stretching the spine.

Hamstring hug: Sit back and place your hands under your right thigh. Pull knee toward chest, then extend the leg straight in front of you as far as you can. Repeat with your other leg.