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Learn how to Deal with Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI)

By Nishanth Reddy

The work pattern of computer professionals carries a lot of orthopedic disorders. The chief

complaint is constant pain in the upper limbs, neck, shoulders, and back. Upper limb disorders (also called RSI, or tenosynovitis) are the most worse as they may rapidly lead to permanent incapacity. Repetitive strain injury occurs when the movable parts of the limbs are injured. Most of the times, the victims of this injury are computer professionals, musicians, students, and others who have to use their hands regularly in a repetitive manner.

Symptoms

The users experience constant pain in the hands, elbows, shoulders, neck, and the back. Other symptoms are cramps, tingling, and numbness in the hands. The hand movements of the user may become clumsy and the person may find it difficult even to fasten buttons.

Another variant may produce painful symptoms in the upper limbs, but the site may be difficult to locate.

The common diagnoses seen in this group are Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, Tenosynovitis, Bursitis, White Limb, and Shoulder pain. A major cause is strain due to long unbroken periods of work. Ergonomics or the lack of it plays a very important role. Lack of information about the condition leads to neglect by the concerned individuals.

Palliative measures

People concerned should seek medical attention when early symptoms set in. Measures that can be adopted at an individual level include:

Posture: The recommended posture to sit in front of a computer is semi-reclined with the forearms resting in a cradle or on an extension of the keyboard support. There should be ample support for the back. The hands should be free and point in the direction of the forearms. The feet should rest on the ground or feet support. The distance of the monitor should be 18 inches or more and at a slightly lower

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level than the eye level.

Rest: The user should take short breaks every 15 minutes and slightly long breaks after every hour.

Hydration: Drink adequate fluids to keep the tendons and soft tissues soft.

Shortcuts: Use keyboard shortcuts instead of mouse. Touch the keyboard softly and do not pound at it. The wrist should rest on the table or wrist rest.

Telephone use: Don't cradle the telephone between the face and shoulder while working, as this can lead to neck strain.

Messages: Don't use the computer while conveying messages in person or through the intercom.

No games: Games or surfing at work may increase stress on your hands.

Preventive Measures at the Organizational Level: Organizations that use computers in a big way can also adopt certain preventive measures.

These include:

1. You need to educate your employees on the importance of adopting a proper posture.
2. Ensure that all your employees are using quality ergonomic furniture that will save loss of working hours by guaranteeing full comfort of the employees.
3. Give periodic reminders through lectures and audio–visual presentations by medical professionals on the importance of taking good care of health while using computers.

When symptoms set in, consult an orthopedic surgeon. Do not make the diagnosis yourself. The diagnosis will be made from the history and clinical findings as there will be no changes in X-rays, since the soft tissues are involved. Nerve conduction studies can confirm the diagnosis. In cases detected earlier, attention to ergonomics will restore normalcy.

In cases diagnosed late, orthopedic treatment like injections and even minor surgery may be necessary.

Remember that all the computer related hazards are not going to hamper your life in a very short span of time. But it may take years to show the symptoms. As I said earlier, prevention is better than cure.

Nishanth Reddy is an Author and Publisher of various health related websites. For more information on Repetitive Strain Injury and Other Computer Related hazards visit:

<http://www.safecomputingtips.com>

Eliminating Repetitive Strain Injuries In The Workplace

By Jeff P. Anliker, LMT

Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSI's) that occur at work are best eliminated at the source; this is the fundamental goal of occupational health and safety.

In the case of repetitive strain injuries, the prime source of injury is continuous repetitive and/or static flexion of the fingers and hands in a unidirectional (one way) motion. (i.e. Mouse use, typing, writing, gripping work tools, etc.) Other components, such as applied force, fixed body position, and the pace of work requiring repetitive or long-term static movements are also contributing factors in becoming afflicted with a disabling repetitive strain injury.

Therefore the main effort to protect workers from repetitive strain such as carpal tunnel syndrome, trigger finger, cubital tunnel syndrome, guyon's syndrome and other injuries should focus on limiting or "counteracting" repetitive and static flexion activities that require constant overuse of the flexor muscles of the hand and forearm. If left unchecked, repetitive or long-term static finger and wrist flexion eventually leads to muscle imbalance and the onset of one of the many debilitating repetitive strain injuries listed above.

Protection against repetitive strain injuries can be achieved through the implementation of workplace protocols that involve the following:

- Job/task rotation
- Individual-specific ergonomic work stations
- Quick Breaks
- Stretching program
- Exercise program

Implementing the workplace protocols listed above is extremely important in maintaining structural integrity and muscle balance of the entire upper extremity. (i.e. Fingers, hands, wrists, forearms, elbows, upper arms, and shoulder.)

If you are beginning to suffer from a repetitive strain injury at work, be sure to consult your company's employee health director for assistance in establishing the protocols listed above in order to keep the injury from progressing any further. Remember – prevention is a lot cheaper than rehabilitation, both physically and financially!

Stay Healthy!

Jeff P. Anliker is a Therapist and Inventor of training systems that are utilized by Corporations, Consumers, Musicians, Athletes and Medical Facilities around the world for rehabilitation and performance enhancement.

<http://www.repetitive-strain.com>

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