

STAYING ON THE SAFE SIDE OF COMPUTER TERMINALS

Your computer allows you to perform many tasks faster and more efficiently than ever before. You probably can't even imagine going back to writing on a typewriter, or keeping records by hand. But it may come as a surprise to you to learn that computer use has its own, unique health hazards. Follow these tips to stay on the safe side:



Practice Body Awareness

It's easy to forget about your body when you're engrossed in what's on your computer screen. Over time, ignoring your body can lead to poor posture habits, which can cause back, neck, and shoulder pain. Make a practice of checking in with your body a few times a day while you sit at the computer. Ask yourself the following:

- How is your weight distributed on your "sitting bones?" Try rolling your pelvis very gently from side to side and from front to back, to find the most comfortable sitting position.
- Can you see what you're doing? To lessen strain on neck muscles, keep your screen no higher than eye level. If you use a document holder, keep it at the same height as your screen.
- How do you hold the telephone receiver? Balancing it between your head and shoulder can lead to neck problems. You might want to try a headset or speaker phone instead.

■ How are you breathing? A few deep breaths might work well to help you relax and focus.

■ Does your body need a break? Even a short break will do wonders to re-energize you. Try neck stretches and shoulder shrugs to relieve tension.

Protect Your Eyes

Glare from monitor screens can be hazardous to eyes. While effects may not be immediate, over the long-run, your vision may be affected.

■ To reduce glare, position your monitor so that neither it nor you faces a window. If necessary, use hoods or screens.

■ Dimmer lighting around your monitor can also reduce glare and make the screen easier to read. Adjust the screen's brightness and

contrast controls to suit lighting conditions.

■ If your screen has a choice of colors, use those easiest on your eyes.

■ Take frequent breaks—just looking away from the screen once every 20 minutes can help ease eye fatigue. Cupping your eyes with your palms, or rolling your eyes around a few times, can also help.

Prevent RMIs

Repetitive Motion Injuries (RMIs) result when the tendons and nerves in the hand, wrist, and arm become irritated from overuse. Without enough recovery time, even activities involving very little force, like typing on a computer keyboard, can cause an RMI. There are several things you can do to reduce your risk of developing this type of injury from computer use:

■ Position yourself and your chair so that your elbows are even with, or slightly higher than, your keyboard. This will help you keep your wrists straight while typing.

■ Be aware of how much force you use on the keys. A lighter touch is better.

■ Pace yourself. Take a short break once every hour that you're on the keyboard. Gently stretch, rotate, and massage your hands and arms.

■ If you feel any weakness, numbness, or pain in your hands or arms, tell your supervisor immediately. The earlier you identify an RMI, the easier it is to prevent a serious disability. ❏