



health &amp; fitness

# office space

## Good work habits prevent repetitive stress injuries

**W**orking at a computer full time can be mentally taxing, but what is it doing to your body?

If you're not careful, you could be at risk for headaches, neck and shoulder pain, eye strain and carpal tunnel syndrome, just to name a few.

While our dependence on computers has made us more efficient multi-taskers, the technology revolution has also given rise to a growing number of cumulative trauma disorders.

"It's a very common problem and what we find is that it builds over time," said Peter Schubbe, a chiropractor with Schubbe Resch Chiropractic & Physical Therapy in Appleton. "The trouble with all of these conditions is that they may be developing for one or two years and people ignore them and start taking over-the-counter medications."

While keyboarding and mouse-clicking may seem innocuous, those repetitive motions over time combined with bad posture and a poorly designed workspace can stress muscles, inflame tendons and pinch nerves.

But with a few simple solutions, a lot of computer-related maladies can be prevented, Schubbe said.

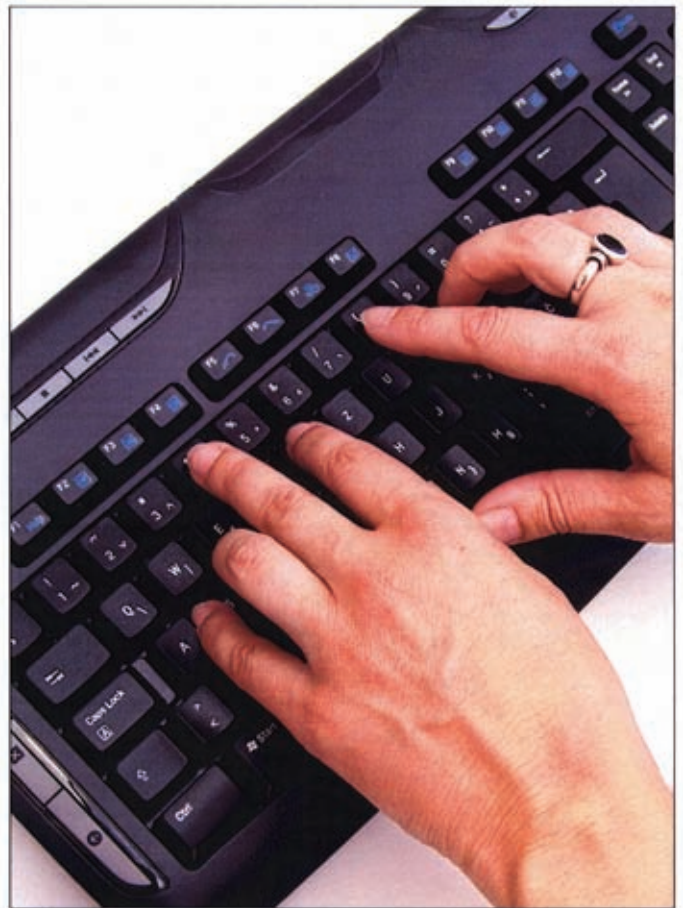
"You always want to first check your posture and it starts with your chair," he said. "The chair needs to be adjusted so that when you sit in it, you always want your bottom all the way back in the chair."

Keep both feet flat on the floor, with your knees bent at 90 degrees, and your upper legs and torso also at 90 degrees, he added.

You should adjust the chair and desk or table height so you can keep your elbows resting at your sides, bent at about 75 to 90 degrees.

"We also do not want people to reach for their keyboard or mouse," Schubbe said. "If there are arms on the chair, adjust them so you can rest your elbows on the

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Peter Schubbe, Fox Valley chiropractor



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arms. That helps alleviate strain to the shoulders and upper back muscles."

And keep your wrists in a neutral position, so they aren't bent up or down.

The final item you want to adjust is your monitor, with the center of the screen aligning with your chin, Schubbe said.

And it should be about 28 to 32 inches from your face.

**"Every hour that you work, you should be up and moving for 10 minutes."**

"If it's too close or too far, people are straining their eyes," he said.

While computer work gives your fingers a workout, the rest of your body can remain sedentary. That can cause problems if you sit in the same position for long periods of time, says physical therapist Steve Barnett of Appleton, owner of Orthopedic & Spine Therapy.

Steve Barnett of Orthopedic & Spine Therapy on avoiding repetitive stress injuries at work

"If you stay static in one position all day, the blood will pool and create more soreness and fatigue," he said.

Barnett suggests following the 50-10 rule.

"Every hour that you work, you should be up and moving for 10 minutes," he said.

And practice "dynamic sitting" while you are seated, he added, which could include stretching your legs, arms and back and other body movements.

"The trouble with computers is that all of the movements are very fine and very small, which creates a lack of exercise and stiffness," Schubbe added. "We need to do bigger body movements and stretches — things that will stimulate circulation."

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