

WEEKLY UPDATE SUBMISSION

YOUR HEALTH & SAFETY

OFFICE ERGONOMICS 101

What's your angle? When negative becomes positive!

COMPUTER WORK – Your keyboard and mouse

Sitting in front of a desktop computer for the majority of your day can be a tiresome position, even with a properly adjusted chair. (see www.campusdaily.dcuoit.ca/EN/footer/news/20060421_4.html.) Considering that your body's position should be evaluated from the floor upwards, quite often the height of your desk impedes a comfortable keyboarding or writing position.

While seated properly in your chair, squarely in front of your computer and keyboard, with thighs parallel to the floor and feet flat on the floor, your forearms should also be parallel to the floor or lower. Our arms' natural position is to hang down at our sides, so when we lift our arms, bending at the elbows to keyboard, we're actually suspending our arms unnaturally.

As we hold our arms bent at the elbow, we risk straining our muscles and tendons and possibly inhibit good circulation in our arms and shoulders.

If your keyboard is positioned on top of your desk, directly in front of your body, your hands should not be higher than your elbows while keyboarding. If this is the case, and you cannot alter the height of your desk, then either:

a) raise the height of your chair and invest in a foot rest to maintain proper support and circulation for your legs, or

b) invest in an adjustable keyboard/mouse tray for the underside of your desk. Most newer models of keyboard trays not only glide forward and back, but also allow you to adjust the tilt of the tray, from parallel to the floor (or 0°) to several degrees in the negative position (-10° for ie.) A negative tilt lowers the keyboard edge closest to your desk, downwards toward the floor, which helps keep your hands in line with your forearms in a more relaxed, natural position. Your shoulders will also thank you.

Tilting your keyboard in a positive position (>0°), increases the risk of repetitive strain injuries as you're bending upwards at the wrist, and your fingers are now higher than your forearms. This strain is amplified if you are also leaning your wrists on the edge of your desk or keyboard tray.

Your mouse, in any case should be on the same level as your keyboard and as close to the left or right side of it as possible. This location will maintain the natural position of your shoulders. Don't be afraid to remove your armrests on your chair if they are in the way! Reaching to use your mouse will increase unnecessary shoulder and neck strain.

Don't hover!

A very common habit while 'mousing' is to rest your wrist on the desk or mouse pad while suspending your fingers over the mouse while waiting for your last command to process, (or hovering). This position again, bends the hand upwards at the wrist, reducing circulation and straining muscles in the hand, wrist, forearm and even the elbow.

Breaking the habit takes practice, but if your work requires a lot of keyboarding and mouse work, take frequent breaks to do other tasks and exercise your hands and wrists by squeezing a stress ball.

Safety means first aid to the uninjured. ~Safety slogan of unknown origin

Please direct all inquiries to Judy Kellar, Human Resources, via e-mail to judy.kellar@dc-uoit.ca, or telephone ext. 2140.