

June 2009 PSA Ergo Tip: Ways to Avoid Neck Injury



Neck injury is a common problem related to computer use. A study by Fred Gerr which appeared in the American Journal of Industrial Medicine in 2002 followed 632 new office-workers. The study found that 30% developed medically diagnosed computer-related neck and shoulder injuries. The impacts were not reflected in workers' compensation records or OSHA logs, since few formally reported their problems. However, the indirect costs related to lost productivity, lost work days, lost expertise through voluntary job changes, and decrease in quality of life are significant.

Here are some ways to help you avoid neck discomfort and injury.

1. **Avoid poor monitor placement.** Make sure the monitor is



Directly in front of you. This will prevent you from turning your neck for prolonged periods of time. If you are using more than one monitor, have the main monitor directly in front of you and move active windows from the ancillary monitor onto the main screen for prolonged projects.

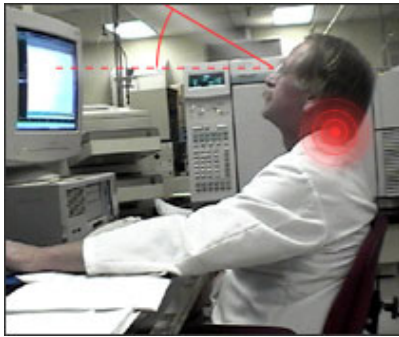
About an arm's length away from you when you are sitting back in the chair - or further if you can comfortably see the screen. (Closer is not better, as it may cause more eye strain). This will allow you to sit back in your chair, with your head and neck supported by the chair, not bending forward to see the screen. You can also adjust the font size so you are not bending forward to read tiny letters.

At a comfortable height. This is usually with eyes level with the first line of text you enter on the screen. If you are using keyboard short-cuts [see February 2009 ergo tip], you will be looking at the screen above this level less often. You can also place the monitor lower if this is more comfortable. Avoid placing the monitor higher as tipping back your head can be particularly tiring for your neck muscles.

Without screen glare – this can be done by moving your computer so that the monitor is perpendicular to a bright light source like a window. Getting shades or blinds for windows, replacing bright over head lights with a desk lamp, and using

lighter screen background colors can help. As a last resort, a glare filter can be used but sometimes it makes it more difficult to see the screen.

2. A message for **graduated / progressive lens wearers (or those soon to be).**



www.osha.gov

Graduated lens wearers usually can only see the monitor in focus through a narrow part of their lens, giving them very little variation in neck position. Make sure that the monitor height allows for a neutral neck position - with the head not tipped forward or back – when using your glasses. Make sure you take 20 minute breaks from this static neck position or try changing the height of the monitor throughout the day. Find out if non-graduated, computer glasses will work for you.

3. **Other helpful neck aids:**



www.osha.gov

In-line documentation holder – if you regularly need to refer to printed pages while you are sitting at your computer, you may benefit from an in-line documentation holder. This will allow you to keep your neck forward.

Phone headsets – if you frequently are using the phone and you must write or use the computer at the same time, you may be a good candidate for a phone headset. This might be helpful if you have neck pain and often hold the phone between your bent neck and shoulder (which is a hard habit to break).



A simple clipboard will allow you to read and write while sitting back in your chair or while standing. This will help you avoid bending your neck forward to use your desk.