

[IMAGE]

## Take the Stress Out of Repetitive Stress Injuries

Repetitive strain injuries (RSIs) are among the most common work-related illnesses in the U.S., affecting hundreds of thousands of people each year. Frequently associated with computer use, RSIs can cause pain and discomfort in the neck, back, arms and hands. They are also quite expensive: The Department of Labor estimates that carpal tunnel syndrome and other repetitive-strain disorders cost more than \$20 billion a year in time lost from work and worker's compensation.

A series of experiments published in a recent issue of *Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback* show how working on a computer can alter a person's posture breathing patterns, and how proper training can reduce the incidence of RSI in the workplace. In the first study, 18 computer users were hooked up to a monitoring system that measured their muscle tension and breathing rate while working at a PC. The monitoring session found that when users became more immersed in their work, they tended to elevate the shoulders and breathe faster. Muscle tension in all of the muscle groups increased, especially the muscles in the upper back opposite the hand that used a computer mouse. In addition, users often continued working without taking breaks, which would have relieved some of the tension and reduced the risk of developing a repetitive strain injury.

In a separate experiment, the researchers trained a group of computer users in muscle relaxation and breathing techniques, then compared them with a group of workers who did not receive training. After three training sessions, the computer users reported significantly decreased symptoms of repetitive strain compared to the untrained workers. Trained users relaxed their necks and shoulders more often, breathed from the diaphragm rather than the chest, and took more frequent breaks.

If you use a computer, there are several steps you can take to reduce, or even eliminate, the risk of repetitive strain injury. Take regular breaks and stretches. Organize your office equipment so it is ergonomically correct. And of course, talk to your doctor about specific exercises and other habits you can adopt to keep RSIs out of your workspace.

*Reference:*

Peper E, Wilson V, Gibney K. The integration of electromyography (SEMG) at the workstation: assessment, treatment and prevention of repetitive strain injury (RSI). *Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback* June 2003.

Repetitive stress injuries are one of many injuries affecting the musculoskeletal system. To learn more about musculoskeletal health, visit [www.chiroweb.com/find/archives/musculoskeletal](http://www.chiroweb.com/find/archives/musculoskeletal).

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