

[IMAGE]

Half of Computer Users May Develop Pain

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that in 1997, 92 million American adults used a computer, almost 40% of all households had a computer, and half of employed adults worked on a computer on the job. Dozens of studies have evaluated musculoskeletal symptoms and disorders of the hands and arms in computer users, yet the long-term effects of numerous hours at the keyboard remain uncertain.

To determine the incidence of conditions developing from workplace computer use, over 600 recently hired employees who used computers at least 15 hours per week were asked to complete diaries on the hours they worked, hours they spent on the computer, and presence of symptoms in their necks, shoulders, hands, and arms for up to three years. Researchers sought those with symptoms requiring medication or scoring high on a pain scale; the results of their study were published recently in the *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*.

Over 50% of the workers suffered from musculoskeletal symptoms in their first year at the new job. Almost one-third suffered a new onset of neck or shoulder symptoms, and a quarter of the individuals suffered new onset of symptoms in the arms or hands. Carpal tunnel syndrome, one of the best-known conditions related to long-term keyboard use, was surprisingly one of the least likely disorders seen in this study - only 1% of the workers developed it. Women and those over age 30 were most likely to exhibit symptoms from computer use.

If you spend many hours in front of a computer, either at work or at home, be sure to use the proper form and follow basic guidelines to avoid injury: Maintain an upright posture; keep your keyboard even with or slightly below elbow level; be sure your mouse and other devices are within easy reach; and be sure to get up and walk around regularly to stretch and get the blood flowing to your extremities.

Reference:

Gerr F, Marcus M, Ensor C, et al. A prospective study of computer users: I. Study design and incidence of musculoskeletal symptoms and disorders. *American Journal of Industrial Medicine* 2002;41(4), pp. 221-235.

Go to <http://www.chiroweb.com/tyh/shoulder.html> for more information on shoulder and arm pain.

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