

Therapeutic Work Solutions Info Corner



This month we launch the Info Corner for TWS brought to you by Steve Lisowe, MSPT, Director of Industrial Rehabilitation. This month Steve gives us suggestions on the proper “ergonomic” set up for your laptop computer.

ergonomic

er-go-nom-ics

(ûr'gə-nŏm'îks)

n.

1. *(used with a sing. verb)* The applied science of equipment design, as for the workplace, intended to maximize productivity by reducing operator fatigue and discomfort. Also called *biotechnology*, *human engineering*, *human factors engineering*.

2. *(used with a pl. verb)* Design factors, as for the workplace, intended to maximize productivity by minimizing operator fatigue and discomfort: *The ergonomics of the new office were felt to be optimal.* (The FREE DICTIONARY by Farlex)

Laptops offer us so much freedom with our computer use because of their portability and relative light weight, but did you know that “nearly 60 percent of computer office workers nationwide suffer from wrist pain while at the computer, and 51.2 percent say their keyboards are placed too high.”? (Repetitive Stress Injury (RSI) by Paige Bierma, M.A., HealthDay) Repetitive Stress Injuries (RSI's) are caused by repeating the same motions over and over and over again and are often associated with computer keyboard work. In fact, what was once primarily an injury common to the manufacturing industry, RSI's have now become more common with the exponential rise in computer use.

The US Bureau of Labor Statistics reports 650,000 work related musculoskeletal disorders, of which RSI's make up approximately 30% and account for roughly 1/3 of workers compensation claims. The resulting costs to employers is over \$20 billion. "Work-related musculoskeletal disorders are the most widespread occupational health hazard facing our nation today," says Charles N. Jeffries, former assistant secretary for occupational safety and health at the U.S. Department of Labor. "The most severe injuries can put people out of work for months and even permanently disable them." (Repetitive Stress Injury (RSI) by Paige Bierma, M.A., HealthDay) That's why it is so important how you interact with any computer, but especially with a laptop computer.

So where do you begin when setting up a computer workstation? Ideally the forearms are parallel to (level with) the ground, and the top line of text that you read on the monitor is level with the eyes, or parallel to the

floor. Keep in mind that certain health conditions may in fact benefit from a lower monitor height (such as use of bifocals or those with a specific kind of eye tracking impairment, or even neck problems). Since you cannot separate the monitor from the laptop's keyboard, what do you do? One solution is to purchase a separate external keyboard that can be plugged into the USB port. This allows you to position the keyboard at one height, and raise the monitor to another height (on books, a laptop riser, or even on the upper part of the desk if you use a keyboard tray). Also grab an extra mouse and place it next to your new keyboard. Of course there are more in depth instructions and explanations on proper “ergonomic” set up of your work station based upon your particular needs and any medical issues that you may be experiencing, but these simple steps should help you get started.

