Health Bits

Health Concerns Related to Computer Use

The widespread use of computers has been causing health concerns. Computer users should be proactive and minimize their chance of health complications. This article discusses computer health risks and preventions.

A repetitive strain injury (RSI) is an injury or disorder of the joints, nerves, muscles, ligaments or tendons. RSIs are the largest job-related injury and illness problem in the U.S. today. OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) has guidelines designed to minimize or prevent workplace injuries with respect to computer usage. Computer-related RSIs include tendonitis and carpal tunnel syndrome.

> *RSIs are the largest job-related injury and illness problem in the U.S. today.*

Tendonitis is inflammation of a tendon due to repeated motion or stress on that tendon. Carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS) is inflammation of the nerve that connects the forearm to the palm of the hand. Repeated and/or forceful bending of the wrist can cause tendonitis or CTS. Common symptoms linked to tendonitis of the wrist include extreme pain that extends from the forearm to the hand, along with a tingling feeling in the fingers. Some symptoms of CTS include numbness and tingling in the thumb and first two fingers, and a burning pain when the nerve is compressed.

(Continued on next page)

GROUP MEETING

The next meeting of the Health Bits Group will be held on Saturday, May 17, at the Glenview Recreation Center (440 Cedar Street) from 11:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. A deli luncheon will be served. The guest speaker, Sean Riverton, will discuss how to keep our environment healthy.

MEMBER DISCOUNTS

Beginning May 1, Health Bits Group members are entitled to a 10 percent discount on regular price products at these stores: Office Warehouse, Simply Nutrition, and The Sports Center. To receive the discount, show your Health Bits Group membership card at the time of purchase.

NEXT ISSUE

Next month's issue of Health Bits will discuss hay fever and other pollen-related allergies.

Health Concerns Related to Computer Use

(Continued from first page)

Long-term computer work can lead to tendonitis or CTS. If untreated, these disorders can lead to permanent damage to your body. You can take many precautions to prevent these types of injuries. Take frequent breaks to exercise your hands. To prevent injury due to typing, place a wrist rest between the keyboard and the edge of your desk. To prevent injury while using a mouse, place the mouse at least six inches from the edge of the desk. In this position, your wrist is flat on the desk. Finally, minimize the number of times you switch between the mouse and the keyboard, and avoid using the heel of your hand as a pivot point while typing or using the mouse.

Another type of health-related condition due to computer use is computer vision syndrome (CVS). You may have CVS if you have sore, tired, burning, itching, or dry eyes; headache or sore neck; blurred or double vision; increased sensitivity to light; and difficulty focusing. CVS is not believed to have serious or long-term consequences.

People who spend entire days using a computer sometimes complain of lower back pain and muscle fatigue. The back pain sometimes is caused from poor posture. One way to help prevent these injuries is to be sure the workplace is designed ergonomically. Ergonomics is an applied science devoted to including comfort, efficiency, and safety in the design of the workplace. Studies have shown that using the correct configuration and type of chair, keyboard, display device, and work surface helps users work comfortably and efficiently and helps protect their health. For the computer area, experts recommend a workspace of at least two feet by four feet.

Hand Exercises to Reduce RSI

- Spread fingers apart for several seconds while keeping wrists straight.
- Gently push back fingers and then thumb.
- Dangle arms loosely at sides and then shake arms and hands.

Techniques to Ease Eyestrain

- Take an eye break every 10 to 15 minutes, rolling eyes in a complete circle and then closing them for a minute.
- Blink eyes every five seconds.
- Place display device about an arm's length away from your eyes with the top of the screen at eye level or below.
- Adjust the lighting.

Methods to Minimize Fatigue

- Sit properly in an adjustable height chair with feet flat on floor
- Take a break every 30 to 60 minutes, standing up and walking around or stretching