

## Easy Ergonomics

An ergonomically friendly workstation improves comfort, minimizes fatigue and can guard against wrist pain and strain. An ill-fitting workstation may lead to overreaching, awkward working positions and repetitive motion strain.



### WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Evaluate** your work area and work habits.
- Adjust your **chair and armrest** heights so that your elbows and knees form right angles.
- Support your lower back. Consider using a lumbar pad or small pillow if your chair does not have **lumbar support**.
- Set your **keyboard** so that your elbows fall comfortably at your sides at right angles, your forearms are parallel to the floor and your wrists are straight. Type with a soft touch.
- Position your **mouse** close to and at the same level as your keyboard.
- Watch your **posture**. If you sit for long periods, keep your neck and back in as straight a line as possible. **Remember:** shoulders rolled back, no slouching, feet flat on the floor (use a footrest if necessary).
- If you share a **workstation** with someone else, take time to adjust chair height and other equipment so you can maintain good posture and natural wrist positions.
- If you use a **telephone** for extended periods, wear a hands-free headset if possible.
- Stretch**, move and walk around periodically. Keep your body strong to reduce your chance of muscle strain and fatigue.

## MORE WRIST CARE TIPS FOR WORK AND HOME

1. **Avoid** contact stress. Pain and injury can develop from what's called "contact stress," when your wrists, forearms or elbows rub against or rest on the leading edges of a workstation table or desk, or on a hard wrist rest. Adjust your workstation to prevent contact stress and so your wrists work in a neutral, straight position.
2. **Rest** your hands in your lap when you're not typing.
3. **Work** with tools that have long, round or oval textured handles, so you use less force when gripping them and the handles do not dig into the palm of your hand. Look for prebent handles that allow you to keep your wrist straight.
4. **Limit** laptop use. Laptop keyboards are small, which may create awkward hand and wrist positioning while typing. If your laptop is your primary computer, consider using a separate keyboard and mouse.
5. **Massage** your fingers, hands and wrists periodically to keep them warm and promote blood circulation.
6. **Lessen** the vibration. When performing tasks that cause vibration on your hands and wrists, wear vibration-dampening work gloves.
7. **Manage** stress. When you're relaxed, you're more likely to remember the good work habits (posture, wrist position and keyboard techniques, for example) that help prevent wrist pain and strain.
8. **Exercise** regularly. When wrist or muscle strain does occur, a generally healthy body can heal more readily. Aim for at least 30 minutes of exercise most days.

**Final thought:** Much of the power to prevent wrist pain and strain is in your hands. When symptoms of wrist and hand trouble persist, see your health care provider for advice.



# PREVENTING WRIST PAIN AND STRAIN

AN EASY-TO-FOLLOW GUIDE



## RAISE YOUR AWARENESS

The human hand is a delicate collection of small bones, nerves, muscles and tendons — all working precisely together with the wrist. It's no surprise that some wrist conditions can disable the hand.

Sudden injury and repetitive motion activities are often to blame when wrist and hand problems occur. People are likely to seek medical help for a sudden injury and get proper treatment. With repetitive motion strain, however, symptoms often go unnoticed as the condition continues to worsen over time.

Wrist, hand and forearm discomfort can become serious. A wrist or hand injury left untreated can eventually make it hard to perform daily tasks, such as driving, brushing your hair, holding a baby or reaching for something on a shelf.

Perhaps you have experienced an ache in your forearm or numbness in your index finger. These symptoms may be cause for concern, especially if you perform repetitive motions at work or with a hobby.

If you have not had any wrist pain or discomfort, remember this: **It is easier to prevent than it is to cure.** There is plenty you can do to prevent wrist pain and strain. The tips in this brochure can help.

## Did you know ...

You may be at greater risk for carpal tunnel syndrome if you have diabetes, chronic arthritis, an underactive thyroid or are overweight; or if you smoke or are pregnant or menopausal. People with small wrists may also be more susceptible to carpal tunnel syndrome.

## Ways to Stop Wrist Pain and Strain

1. **Evaluate ergonomics.** An ergonomically friendly workstation allows you to sit comfortably and avoid awkward movements and overreaching.
2. **Maintain good posture.** It can help prevent repetitive stress injuries of the wrists and hands, as well as the neck and back.
3. **Strengthen the muscles** responsible for movements opposite of your repetitive motions. **Example:** If you type, occasionally flex your fingers and bend them gently back toward your wrist.
4. **Take wrist and finger breaks,** even during leisure activities that involve repetitive motion, such as computer games and racquet sports.
5. **Change your work routine. Try to:** arrange work to avoid unnecessary motions, let power tools and machinery do the work, spread repetitive work over the day, use tools for short periods of time and take stretch pauses, rotate tasks with co-workers if possible, change hands or motions frequently or alternate tool use with some other work that will give some respite.
6. **Grip objects using your whole hand and fingers,** not just your fingertips. When using any device, vary your movements to avoid repetitive motion. Grip strength decreases when you bend your wrists, pick up slippery items, wear poorly fitting gloves or have cold hands.
7. **Exercise regularly and stay fit.** Improved blood circulation helps your body repair the damage that could lead to carpal tunnel syndrome.

**Remember:** Not all pain in the wrists and hands means carpal tunnel syndrome. First evaluate your work habits and make changes; then tell your supervisor and seek professional advice if the symptoms don't go away.

## Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

Carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS) is a common repetitive motion condition that affects the wrists and hands. It occurs gradually, when you hold your arms, hands and wrists repeatedly in an incorrect position while typing, using a mouse, cutting hair or working on an assembly line, for example; or during leisure activities that involve awkward wrist and hand positions, such as sewing, knitting, gardening, playing an instrument or woodworking.

With carpal tunnel syndrome, the tendons in the hand and wrist become irritated and begin to swell, pinching the median nerve in the wrist. Tingling, or a feeling of "pins and needles," and numbness in the fingers and thumb are the earliest symptoms, and they often get worse at night.

**Listen to your body.** Pain and discomfort are your body's alarm system. Evaluate your workstation ergonomics, change your typing habits, and maintain proper posture and wrist position while you work. Vary your activities to give your hands and wrists a break from repeated activities. Do not ignore the symptoms, even if they are relieved by over-the-counter pain medications.



## 1-MINUTE WRIST EXERCISES

**The Wrist Stretch.** Hold your arms straight out with hands facing down, then raise your hands at the wrist until you feel the stretch in your forearms. Relax and repeat three times.



**The Palm Push.** Place your hands palm down on a table with fingers outstretched and wrists bent about 90 degrees. Gently press your palms against the table surface for five seconds. Relax and repeat three times.



**The Finger Fan.** Make two tight fists, then spread your fingers as far apart as you can. Hold for five seconds, then relax. Repeat three times.