

Protect yourself : computer Health and Safety issues

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The information in this guide will help you to develop good working practices when using a personal computer or workstation.
If you learn good habits now, it saves you from experiencing problems in the future.

Adopt a good posture

A good working posture is one which can be sustained with the minimum of static muscular effort. In general, a varied working position is better than a fixed working posture.
However, a working position which is static and relaxed, is better than one which is static and tense.

Your upper body is most comfortable when:

- Your back is supported.
- Your head is up.
- Your upper arms are relaxed.

Your hands and wrists are most comfortable when:

- Your forearm is nearly at a right angle to your upper arm.
- Your wrist is in a straight line with your hand and forearm.

Adjust your seating position

In order to improve your posture, adjust your chair so that:

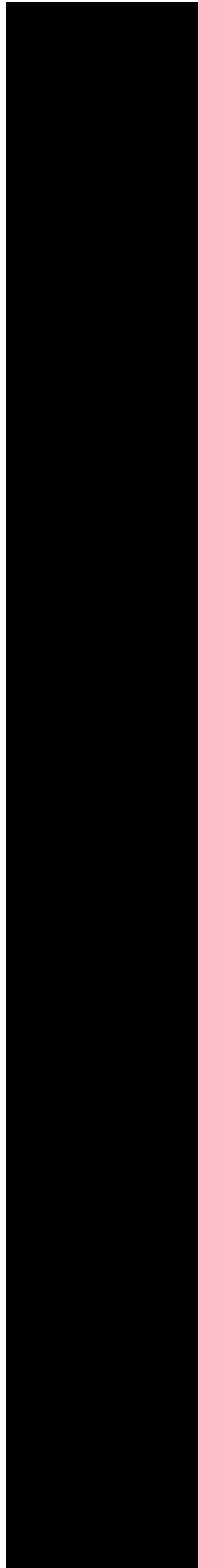
- Your lower back is supported.
- Your knees are level with your hips.
- Your feet are flat on the floor.
- Your eye level is just above the top of the screen. Tilt your screen if necessary.
- The screen is directly in front of you, not at an angle.

Type using both hands ... or better still, learn to touch type

If your arms are raised or your wrists are bent for long periods of keyboarding, tendon and nerve disorders can result.

It is worth learning to touch type because typing encourages the correct positioning of your hand and wrist so you will not overstrain your forefingers.

Remember that using the mouse a great deal can put a strain on your hand and wrist muscles.



Repetitive Strain Injury - RSI

Keyboard-induced RSI is caused by a combination of rapid keyboard movements, by arms in a static position, over a long period of time.

There are several factors that can lead to keyboard-related RSI.

These include:

- Rapid, repetitive movements.
- An awkward working position.
- An excessive work- load.
- Tight deadlines.
- Inadequate rest breaks.

To prevent the symptoms of RSI, watch your posture, work at a steady rate and take regular breaks from the screen.

Eyes right

According to medical evidence, computer use is not associated with damage to your eyes or eyesight; nor does it make existing defects worse.

However, eye muscles that shift focus between your source document and a screen for a long period of time can tire.

The symptoms of eye strain include:

- Headaches
- Itching eyes
- Burning eyes
- Blurring
- Nausea
- Fatigue.

If you wear contact lenses you may experience the sensation of dry eyes whilst using a computer. This is because you may blink less often than usual.

Radiation

The Health and Safety Executive state that there is no evidence that electromagnetic radiation emitted from computers causes miscarriages, cataracts or skin diseases.

Take a break

To prevent the onset of fatigue, you should have a break, or change of activity, for about 10 minutes after every uninterrupted 60 minutes of computer work.

Short, frequent breaks are more satisfactory than occasional, longer breaks.

If possible, breaks should be taken away from the screen.

In between breaks, look into the distance and stretch occasionally.

Your safety in the computer lab.

- Please refrain from eating and drinking in the labs.
- Avoid obstructing gangways with your bags, coats or belongings.
- Remove your printout from the printers before you leave the lab.

Further information

Please contact the University's Health and Safety Office on 01782 292726 if you require further advice on any matters raised in this leaflet.

If you begin to experience any of the ill-health problems identified in this leaflet, you must report immediately to your tutor, supervisor or manager.

Sources of information used in this leaflet

Health and Safety Executive

Display screen equipment work: regulations 1992, HSE 1992

London Hazards Centre- VDU work and the hazards to health, LHC 1993

Pheasant, Stephen - Ergonomics, work and health, Macmillan 1991