



Physiotherapists:  
The Body Specialists

# Physio Tips

## LAPTOPS

### Physiotherapy Association of BC

#### LAPTOPS

Physiotherapists offer advice to prevent injury from mobile technology. We now work anywhere, using wireless technology like laptops and Physiotherapists are seeing more and more clients suffering from pain that results from working directly at their laptops.

The long periods people spend working without taking breaks, sitting with their heads bent forward and shoulders hunched often triggers pain from the serious effects of the neck and shoulders to the wrists and hands.

Musculoskeletal disorders are one of the most common causes of severe long-term pain and physical disability, and are considered one of the biggest health problems facing mobile workers today. Statistics show that an increasing number of laptop users experience ongoing aches and pains. Many of these injuries can be prevented with improved work habits and posture.

Physiotherapists are concerned with the increase of repetitive strain injuries (RSI) and other soft tissue injuries as people spend more and more time slouching over their laptop. Many individuals discount the discomfort that they feel until they are experiencing full blown symptoms of RSI by then the problem is much more difficult to resolve.

Many of these injuries can be prevented with improved work habits and posture.

Physiotherapists have the knowledge and skills to advise on modifications to the work environment as well as giving guidance on improving work habits and postures. Specific strengthening and stretching exercises, combined with aerobic conditioning, may be part of the prescription to prevent recurrence of RSI. Prevention and early intervention are the preferred approaches to managing RSI. Simple changes such as adding an external keyboard or mouse, and raising the monitor screen, will allow you to adopt a healthier working posture.

Laptops defy the ergonomic principle of allowing for optimal posture for musculoskeletal health, and laptop users who spend hours on end typing text will have likely suffered the consequential sore shoulders and tight neck.

For example, if you're working with elbows at the recommended 90-degree angle, the laptop's screen position will require that you bend your neck forward to view it, which puts excessive loading through the joint of your neck. But if you raise the laptop to eye level, then you are typing an awkward angle that can put strain through wrists and elbow joints. While extended computer usage of any kind can be hard on your body, prolonged laptop use can be especially hard on the user.

Physiotherapists recommend using key commands and shortcuts whenever possible, buying laptops equipped with adjustable height screens, and using an external keyboard when typing for extended periods.

- Make frequent postural changes and take breaks;
- Remove unnecessary supplies from carrying case such as drivers, batteries, and cables;
- Select a carrying case with wheels or backpack style.
- If these options do not work for you try periodically alternate carrying on the left and right shoulders or hands;
- Use a docking station, external keyboard, and pointing device whenever possible;
- Be creative – try using items around you to optimize your setup. For example, use your portable computer on top of the carrying case to - raise the monitor to eye level or use a three-ring notebook to incline/decline to a better angle. This is especially effective when using an external keyboard;
- Alternate from your lap to a desk every 30 minutes.

Physiotherapists are experts in movement and mobility, body mechanics, muscles and joints. They will help develop an exercise program specially-tailored to your needs, putting together the right combination of activities to improve physical fitness and avoid injury.

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