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## **Avoiding Workplace Injuries** **By: Dr. Stephen O'Neil**

Injuries occur in every workplace at some time or another. Most people think of injuries happening from heavy lifting or some sort of trauma, a fall or a collision. The fact is that most workplace injuries occur much slower and insidiously. They are repetitive motion or strain injuries. They are often downplayed or ignored because they happen over time and in a slower relaxed setting such as an office. However, they can be as severe and debilitating as injuries sustained in more traumatic ways.

Most office workers are required to spend long hours working on the computer while intermittently talking on the phone. These actions when performed repetitively day in and day out while in a position with head turned and arms extended places tremendous strain on our muscles and joints in the upper back and neck. When compounded with improper design and setup of office space these daily stresses lead to repetitive strain injuries.

Repetitive strain injuries have skyrocketed in the last 2 decades due to increasing reliance on workplace technology. Health Canada estimates that musculoskeletal disorders including back pain cost our society \$16.4 billion in combined treatment and lost productivity costs.

When it comes to office work, a few small changes and simple ergonomic corrections can make the difference between optimal productivity and repetitive strain injuries. Proper size and placement of workplace equipment can ensure that workers can perform safely and efficiently in their work environment.

Some simple changes can make a much safer work area:

1. The Keyboard- position it above your lap, you should be able to type comfortably with your arms close to your body, wrists level and elbows bent at 90 degrees.
2. The Computer Monitor- position it directly in front of you. Reduce glare by removing direct light and keeping the monitor clean.
3. The Mouse- Grip the mouse lightly with little pressure. Use your elbow to guide the mouse instead of just the wrist. Again, make sure the mouse is placed in a position so the arm is relaxed and close to the body.
4. The Telephone- Use the hand to support the phone against the head and switch sides regularly. Never cradle the phone between the ear and the shoulder. The best alternative to consider is a headset to eliminate this stress altogether.
5. The Chair- Sit upright in the chair and all the way back. Your chair should be set at a height so that your knees are bent at a 90-100 degree angle with your feet flat on the floor. If there is no built in arch support for the low back, a small pillow or rolled up towel for extra lumbar spine support will do to help support the natural curve of the low back and decrease pressure.

When doing extensive computer work it is also very beneficial to take breaks often to rest the eyes and stretch the body parts to avoid overuse and fatigue. If you experience any pain or symptoms related to work don't delay in consulting a chiropractor. Chiropractic care is often the safest and most effective solution for workplace injuries.

Chiropractic care can also help prevent injuries from occurring and promote quicker healing. Some of the above information is courtesy of the Ontario Chiropractic Association.