

What are Our Gadgets Doing to Our Bodies?

From the Rehabilitation Services Department at Morton Hospital

From aching necks to throbbing thumbs, Americans are dealing with a variety of ailments that may result from our love affair with electronic gadgets. According to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, frequent computer use may be related to nerve, muscle, tendon and ligament damage. The proliferation of laptops, tablets, Smartphones, portable electronic games and other mobile devices has only added to the potential strain.

Some Common Conditions

Overuse, poor posture and less-than-ideal work stations may contribute to some of these conditions:

- Wrist and hand pain. The repetitive motions involved with typing and moving a mouse may result in tendinitis (inflamed tendons) or bursitis (inflammation of the sacs of cushioning fluid). There is some controversy over whether carpal tunnel syndrome is related to repetitive stress, but it may be possible. Carpal tunnel syndrome occurs when thickened, irritated tendons at the base of the hand press on a nerve. Symptoms may include tingling, numbness and sharp pains through the wrist and up the arm.
- De Quervain's tendinitis. Possibly caused by overuse (think constant text-messaging or game-playing), De Quervain's tendinitis occurs when tendons on the thumb side of the wrist become swollen or irritated. Pain at the base of the thumb can make it difficult to grasp objects.
- Back, shoulder and neck pain. Hours of hunching over a computer – especially if stressed or under a deadline – may result in sore and strained muscles.

An Ounce of Prevention

Here are a few tips to avoid letting your gadgets get the best of you:

- If you use a desktop computer, be sure your workstation is properly set up with the monitor and keyboard adjusted for your height and optimal viewing distance. Using a gel-filled or padded wrist support may help reduce strain on the wrists in some cases.
- If you plan to use a laptop for an extended period, you may want to consider plugging in an external keyboard so you can adjust the monitor to a more comfortable viewing position. The same applies to extended use of tablets.
- Practice good posture. Don't hunch your shoulders or cradle a phone in your neck while working.
- Take regular breaks. Get up and stretch or walk – if only for a minute or two – at least once every hour, and preferably every half hour.
- Avoid constant texting. If you have a long message to deliver, consider using your phone to call rather than text.

A Pound of Cure

If you do find that pain in your hand, wrist, arm or back and shoulders is affecting your quality of life or ability to work, you may benefit from physical or occupational therapy. Morton Hospital's outpatient physical and occupational therapy departments offer a variety of services to help patients regain maximum function after illness or injury. Our highly trained staff of licensed physical therapists, occupational therapists, physical therapy assistants, and other supportive professionals has extensive experience and clinical expertise in many areas of rehabilitative medicine.

Our services include orthopedics, sports medicine, post-surgical rehabilitation, work conditioning, hand and elbow therapy, and more. In addition to treating conditions like tendonitis and carpal tunnel syndrome, our team provides a multidisciplinary approach to providing care to patients with a variety of orthopedic conditions, including:

- Fractures and sprains
- ACL tears
- Shoulder instability
- Osteoarthritis (OA)
- Joint pain and arthritis
- Rotator cuff strains and tears
- Degenerative disc disease
- Knee ligament and cartilage injuries

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