



Ergonomics – Hand and Wrist Injuries

If we damage our wrists, hands, and fingers, our work and personal lives will suffer greatly. Knowing that, we should do all we can to prevent such injuries.

OHSU employees experience wrist, hand, and finger injuries at a rate that deserves our attention.

Most of these are **Repetitive Stress Injuries**. The name implies that they are the result of repeat physical stresses to wrists, hands, and fingers over time. Symptoms you should watch for include:

- Fatigue or lack of endurance.
- Tightness, discomfort, or pain in the hand, wrist, fingers, forearms or elbows.
- Tingling, numbness, or cold hands.
- Clumsiness or loss of strength and coordination in the hands.
- Difficulty picking up/ holding objects.
- Extremity pain that wakes you at night.

We know that the bulk of these Repetitive Stress Injuries are **related to computer use** and input devices including mouse and keyboard, and we also know that the bulk of these injuries are preventable! It is important to identify the risk factors associated with these injuries and know how to minimize them.

The following **risk factors** can contribute to injury:

- **Heavy computer/mouse use (more than 2 to 4 hours a day)**. If you can, break up your work into smaller time chunks throughout the day.
- **Poor computer technique/work posture**. Keep your hands and wrists in a neutral position while you work. This means keeping them flat and straight - minimizing angles and staying as relaxed as possible. Your palms should never rest on the desk or keyboard while typing. Keyboards should never be angle toward you; angled away is preferred. Also, try to make gentle keystrokes and mouse clicks.
- **Inadequate tools**. Anyone who works for more than a couple of hours at a computer should have an adjustable keyboard tray with an integrated mouse surface to allow them to get into an optimal working posture. When the mouse is placed on the desk, you increase your chances for injury.
- **Infrequent work breaks**. Take work breaks or switch gears to do something different for a few minutes. The natural healing processes of the body are optimized with task variety and body motion.
- **Little or no exercise**. Keep up with your overall health to maintain good blood flow and muscle tone.

