



KAISER PERMANENTE
**PREVENTION
& SELF-CARE**

Making Your Work Area Work for You

Tips for Prevention and Self-Care of Repetitive Stress Injury

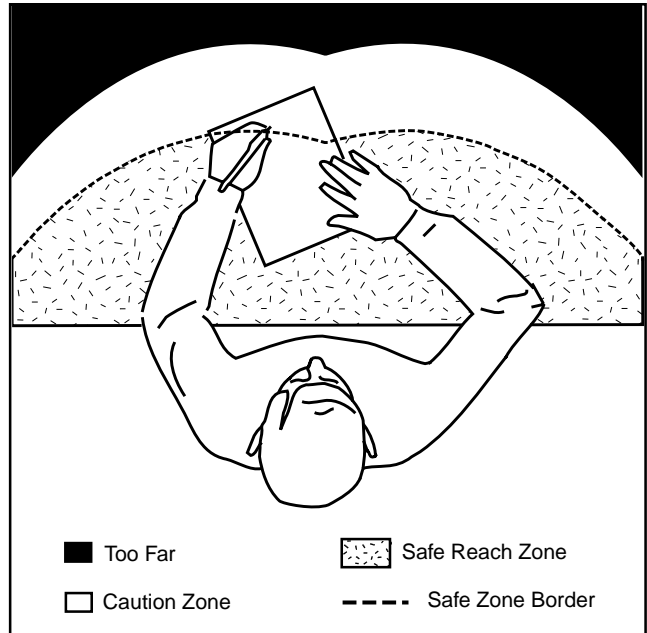
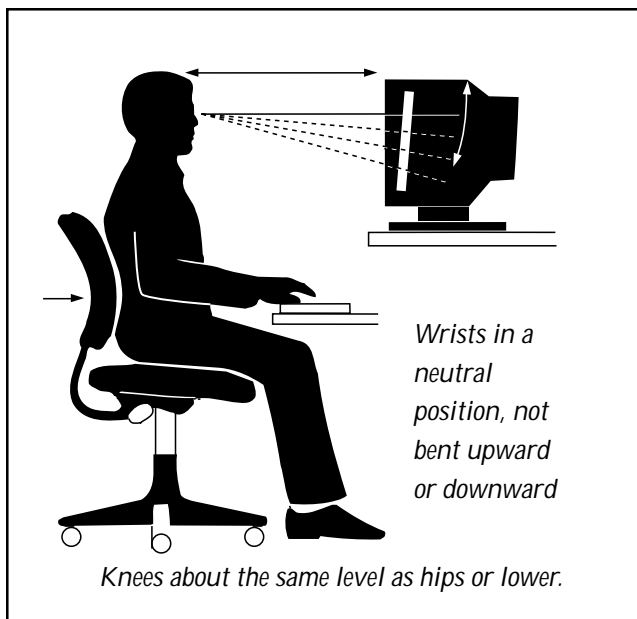
Remaining in one position and doing repetitive tasks (typing, small parts assembly, crafts) can cause Repetitive Stress Injury (RSI). To prevent RSI (injury to the muscles, tendons and nerves from repetitive movements) you need to change positions often, be supported while you're working, and take "Exercise Moments". (See also the "Exercise Moment" for Seated Workers Tip Sheet.)

Here are some tips for taking care of problems early and some suggestions for "quick fixes" to make sure your workstation is working for *you*.

❖ YOUR NECK HURTS

Are you working with your neck bent forward? Bring your materials closer to eye level. Slant boards and stands are useful for holding items.

Is your computer monitor placed too low or off to the side? Raise the monitor so that your eyes are level with the top of the screen. Make sure the monitor is directly in front of you.



Do you wear bifocals? Lower your monitor so that the screen is visible in the reading part of your glasses. Make sure your prescription is up-to-date.

Do you use a telephone while doing tasks such as writing? Avoid holding the phone with your shoulder. Try using a headset.

❖ YOUR SHOULDER HURTS

Do you reach out a lot? Bring objects closer to your body (see Safe Reach Zone, above), move chair closer, or stand up to reach. If you use a mouse or a calculator, bring it close to your body.

Is your work surface too high? Your keyboard or work surface should be low enough to allow your shoulders to be relaxed, arms at your sides, forearms about level with the floor, and wrists straight, not bent up, down, or to either side.

If your work surface is too high, raise your chair and rest your feet on a footstool or phone book so your feet don't dangle.

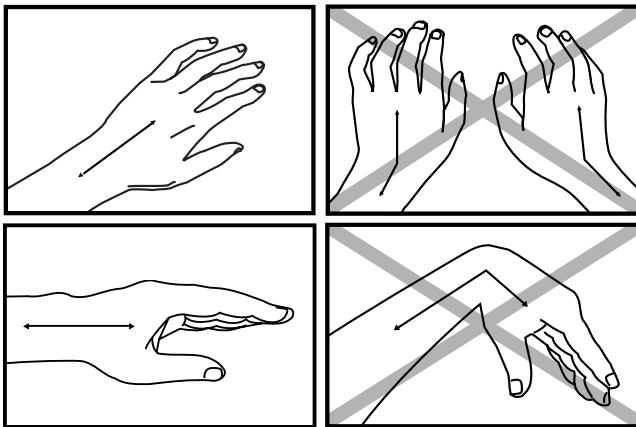
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❖ YOUR ELBOW HURTS

Do you have a forceful grip? Your pen, mouse, or tools should be modified to make the grip soft, large, and rough rather than small, hard, and slippery. You can use pen sleeves, grippers, foam sleeves from hair curlers, sponge material, caulking material, or cloth tape. Look for special ergonomic tools in hardware stores. If you drive a lot, use a lamb's wool or fake fur steering wheel cover. If you use a mouse, relax your hand and click *gently*, or try a trackball.

❖ YOUR WRIST HURTS OR YOUR HANDS ARE NUMB

Do you have a forceful grip? (see above)



Correct Positions

Incorrect Positions

Are your wrists bent in any direction? Keep wrists straight for typing or tool use—do not bend them downward, upward, or sideways. Instead, use your whole arm for movements. Important: Do not use the keyboard wrist rest *while* you are typing—only when you are truly “resting”.

Are you “pounding”? Do your work lightly and gently, with your wrists straight.

❖ YOUR UPPER BACK HURTS

Are you reaching too far? Avoid long reaches. (see information under “Your shoulder hurts”)

Are you slouching? Make sure you have good low back and arm support. Stand and stretch every 20-30 minutes and recheck your posture. See the “Exercise Moment” tip sheet. If your chair has arm rests that are too low or too far away from your body, wrap foam around them to widen and raise the armrest.

❖ YOUR LOWER BACK HURTS

Are you well-supported? Sit with knees below hip level with feet supported. Stand and stretch every 20-30 minutes. Make sure your low back is supported with a good chair, a lumbar support pillow, or rolled-up towel.

Do you stand while you work? Stand with one foot up on a block of wood, small stool, or cushion. After a while switch off with the other foot. Rocking side to side also decreases low back pain.

Other Tips:

Because a problem in one part of your body can affect other parts, consider all of these tips, regardless of where you are having pain.

Have a co-worker watch you work. It's helpful to have someone watch you work and make suggestions based on this handout.

Get regular aerobic exercise such as walking. At least 30 minutes on most days.

Rotate your work tasks. This allows you to change positions and use different muscles and tendons.

Take your breaks and lunch. Try to avoid a lot of overtime. Go for a brief walk, do stretches, and relax on your breaks. Both your body and your mind need it.

Apply these tips to any work tasks — small parts assembly, driving, knitting, computer use, cutting hair, etc.

The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical care and information you receive from your physician or health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have further questions, please consult your physician or other health care professional.

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Kaiser on the Job