Body

HOME > Body

Computer crisis

Posted On Sunday, April 27, 2008

While we all use the computer with absolute abandon, very few of us actually stop to consider the health hazards this all-powerful machine possesses

Karan Agrawal

They are the lifeline for every individual today. Ultra-sleek, very light, designer colours with fancy brand names, and some of the species being portable; most of us cannot begin to comprehend life without the personal computer (PC). While it is now an established norm that we need to spend at least 8-10 hours on the computer everyday to earn our daily bread, very few of us consider the health hazards which are omnipresent when it comes to using either a PC or a laptop. While the common and banal danger of eyestrain exists, there is also the ever-increasing spate of orthopaedic problems and all of a sudden, an entire stream of undocumented psychological problems that have started creeping into the lives of

Body
Page 1 of 20
- Osteoarthritis
- A drop in time saves lives
- A 'low' existence
- Early to bed is wise
- Micro Dentistry

[Next]

Buy/Sell/Exchange

Personal Health Record

Sign up for E-Newsletter

E-Card

Health Poll

Do you believe in having online friends whom you have never met?

Yes

No

Can't Say

Vote

Post a comment on this poll

Suggest a Poll

computer users.

Keep an eye out

Viewing data on a computer screen is different than viewing a typewritten or printed page. The letters on a computer screen are not as precise or sharply defined, the level of contrast is reduced and the presence of glare and reflections on the screen may make viewing more difficult. All this results in eye problems being the most common hazard of using the computer. And, with almost one-third of the day being spent staring at the computer screen, it is but natural that by the end of the day your eyes are going to start complaining.

The problem

"All problems of the eyes associated with using the computer can be clubbed under the Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS)," says Dr Cyres K Mehta, consultant ophthalmic surgeon and director, Mehta International Eye Institute and consultant ophthalmic surgeon, Masina Hospital. Symptoms of CVS include headaches, blurred vision, neck pain, fatigue, eye strain, dry, irritated eyes, and difficulty refocusing the eyes. CVS generally occurs because we don't give our eyes enough rest while staring at the screen, and also do not blink at regular intervals, to lubricate the eye.

Other factors abetting CVS include improper monitor position, excessive monitor brightness and improper lighting around the workplace.

The solution

According to Dr Mehta, there is a simple five point programme you should follow in order to make sure you don't suffer from CVS.

1. The monitor should be kept below the eye level, more than 14 inches away from the eye, with the brightness adjusted to a tolerable level. It is also better to use an LCD rather than a CRT monitor.
2. You should blink frequently to lubricate your eyes.
3. You should also use artificial tears to supplement the lubricating effect of blinking.
4. The monitor should be positioned in such a way that there is minimal fluorescent lighting (from tube lights) reflecting off the screen. This reflection of fluorescent light causes difficulty in focussing and therefore eyestrain.
5. Finally, it is important to take breaks every 15-20 minutes in order to relax the ciliary muscles of the eye, which are responsible for focussing. In order to relax

5 Tips to Lose Belly Fat
Stop making these 5 mistakes & you will finally lose your belly fat!
www.BellyFatIsUgly.net

Ergonomic Workstations
Get Multiple Quotes On Your Order
Custom Office Designs Available!
www.BuyerZone.com/Cubicles

Ads by Google

Ads by Google

3 Tips for Sexy Thighs
Stop making these 3 mistakes to Lose Body Fat and get sexy thighs
www.realfatloss.com

Workstation computer
Vostro 1400 at Rs 33,900 With With Intel® Centrino® Processor
www.dell.com/india

Back Pain Exercise
Find information to tone your back at iVillage - the Women's Network.
yourtotalhealth.ivillage.co

Cervical Spine Rehab
Treatment for spinal injuries, whiplash, and chronic neck pain.
btetech.com

the muscles, gaze into the distance for a few minutes. It is best if you sit near a window while doing this as you can focus on the greenery around which is relaxing to the eye.

Watch your back

While this piece of advice is generally doled out to those who are in the line of fire, it would not go amiss for anyone who's using a computer either. And while you're watching your back, you might consider watching your neck, shoulders, elbows, wrists, thighs and even feet as well. Strange as it may sound, unless you keep an eye on all these and make sure they are correctly aligned to each other and your workstation, you might find yourself visiting your orthopaedic surgeon and physiotherapist a little more frequently than you'd like.

The problem

"Most orthopaedic problems seen in computer users stem from the fact that they adopt the wrong posture," says Dr Shreedhar Archik, joint replacement specialist, Lilavati and Shushrusha hospitals. "Due to an incorrect posture, there is a lot of stress placed on the back and neck, which results in chronic neck and back pain," he adds.

Other common orthopaedic problems seen in computer users are wrist pain, elbow pain, and shoulder pain. "These injuries are caused due to incorrect support to the joints," elaborates Dr Archik. "Computer users do not generally provide adequate support to or correctly rest their elbows and wrists, resulting in stress to the joints and subsequent pain. Such an injury is known as a repetitive stress injury (RSI), and is caused due to repetitive stress on a joint due to incorrect support and long duration of use of that joint," he continues.

The solution

So while you may feel that lazing about in bed while you chat with your friends, or leaning back in your chair as you read that email isn't all that bad, you should really be focussing on making sure your posture is correct if you want to continue to use your computer without pain. "A good posture for computer use contains three 90-degree angles. The torso is perpendicular to the thighs, which are perpendicular to the legs, which are perpendicular to the feet," explains Dr Archik.

In order to avoid an RSI of the wrist (Carpal-Tunnel Syndrome), consider getting an attachable wrist board for your keyboard, and use a mouse pad that contains a wrist

support. This will ensure proper padding for your wrists, which will provide it with the correct support.

Useful exercises

Fitness expert and back pain specialist, Mehernaaz Damania recommends the following exercises to avoid being plagued by back and neck pain while using the computer. This set of exercises should be repeated at half-hourly intervals.

1. Turn your neck from side to side at moderate speed 4-5 times.
2. Tilt your head to one side till your ear touches your shoulder, straighten, and repeat on the other side. Do this at moderate speed 4-5 times.
3. Roll your shoulders first clockwise and then anticlockwise 4-5 times at moderate speed.
4. To loosen your lower back, sit on a chair, bend forwards and let your body andd neck hang loose.
5. If possible, sit on a Swiss ball and bounce gently every few minutes.
6. Sit upright with your elbow at a 90 degree angle and your forearms touching each other in front of your face. Open your arms to expand the chest and stretch the chest and shoulders. Repeat 5-6 times.
7. Stand up and bend sideways from the waist left and right. Repeat 5-6 times.

Damania also recommends getting up every 15-20 minutes and taking a short walk to loosen the body.

Mind over matter

Mental problems are the latest in the range of health hazards we can attribute to the computer. From addictions to suicide bids, the simple lack of a PC can be the signal for pure desperation. It seems our productivity, number of friends and indeed existence is directly proportional to the number of hours we spend glued to the workstation, staring at the screen and pecking away at the keyboard.

The problem

Often, people get so addicted to the computer (and in the bargain, the internet), that they cannot imagine life without it. Dr Laura Vaz, clinical psychologist and psychoanalyst, cites the example of a young girl who attempted suicide twice when her parents took away the modem of her computer. “The basic problem is that people do not really see the computer for what it is – a tool. They see it as a crutch to solve

all their difficulties and also as a means of escaping reality," opines Dr Vaz. This problem is not only limited to the younger generation, but also to working professionals. Dr Vaz has counselled several married couples in which either partner spends too much time on the computer and/or forgoes sleep and physical interaction, leading to a break in the marriage.

Quite apart from using it as a tool for escapism, most people view the computer as their sole means for social interaction. Jeeya Sethi, a 26-year old event manager, prefers to use social networking websites and instant messaging programs to keep in touch with her friends, rather than pick up the phone or meet them in person. She says that it is more convenient as she can then multi-task, rather then focus all her attention on the conversation. People often also use the Internet to connect with strangers as they are feeling 'lonely', which is another dangerous trend. Dr Vaz attributes this to lack of time in today's fast-paced world, and also the desire for a quick fix, short term solution as against a long term, permanent solution.

The solution

There is no real solution to the above problems. It is more a question of inculcating the correct habits early on. "When children just begin to use the computer, they should be taught to see it as nothing more than a tool, and should be taught the correct attitude towards using a computer," advises Dr Vaz. She further advises the parents of such children to set the correct example by not overusing the computer themselves, and also talking to their children about the dangers of the computer.

For adults who are addicted to the computer, there is no other solution save for psychological therapy and treatment for their addiction. The treatment is similar to the treatment given to drug and alcohol addicts.

As for those of us who use the PC to connect to the world at large, Dr Vaz advises attitude building and personality growth development in order to understand healthy social interaction and participate in it.

So next time you plan to spend all night looking at your beloved PC screen, chatting with your friends; or hang around the office all day just to complete that one pending assignment, consider giving both yourself and your computer a break. It might just help you see the day when you don't have to pay so much attention to it all… your computer does that for you!

Back to Section Stories