

The Comfort Zone



Upper Limb Musculoskeletal Health at Work

What is Upper Limb Musculoskeletal Health?

Our definition of upper limb musculoskeletal symptoms follows the ACC guidelines:

“An umbrella term [for] a range of conditions which is characterised by pain, and/or other sensations in muscles, tendons, nerves, soft tissues and joints”.

Musculoskeletal symptoms, particularly pain and discomfort, in the upper limbs, are common. One study showed that in an adult population around 50% experience musculoskeletal symptoms at some stage during a 6 week period. Of these, 22% will describe the predominant site as “neck”, “shoulder”, or “hand/finger”.¹

This says that at any time in a six week period a significant percentage of the adult population will experience upper limb discomfort. This discomfort generally lasts for approx seven days but can last longer. Upper limb discomfort is therefore very common and it is normal to experience discomfort.

Current research shows that the best approach to managing upper limb musculoskeletal symptoms is to remain in control of your discomfort from the start so you don't end up with long term problems.

Responding to this discomfort will in most cases ensure the symptoms go away.

Improving Comfort in the Workplace

Research has shown the factors below are important to think about in terms of comfort in the workplace - some are more important than others:

- Work systems e.g. communication, balancing
 - team needs
 - task needs
 - individual needs.
- Ergonomics - fitting the task/equipment to the person.
- Micropausing - mini breaks.
- Taking rest breaks - regular rest breaks, lunch, morning tea, micropauses etc
- Work organisation - managing deadlines, workload, daily activities.
- Task variation e.g. varying amounts of time in sitting and standing.
- Job satisfaction - valuing the positives you get from working.
- Management, supervisor and colleagues support in the workplace

Modifying workplace design, equipment and tasks may make the worker more comfortable. These modifications do NOT always need to be expensive! Often simple, commonsense solutions can provide practical long-term benefits.

What do I do if I have discomfort?

These are some guidelines to follow based on the ACC Employer Guidelines – Active and Working. Do not hesitate to contact your Line Manager, Health & Safety Advisor or Rehabilitation Coordinator if you have any questions or concerns.

Responsibilities	Employee	Line Manager
Before a Problem Occurs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Take regular breaks - Vary work tasks - Look at tasks and workplace set up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Problem solving work tasks with staff - Ensuring staff take breaks - Ensuring task variation
Onset of Pain (Up to 1 week)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use self help approach - Take simple pain relief - Stay active and modify activities if necessary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourage early reporting of pain and discomfort
Report Pain (Up to and beyond 1 week)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Report pain if tasks or safety affected - Tell work about difficult tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review worksite factors involved and respond quickly with modified tasks / hours as necessary - Make recommended changes - Be aware of changes to your staff - Keep records
Seek Treatment (if no improvement)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stay active and at work - Follow treatment advice about work tasks and hours, activities and pain relief 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Foster ‘stay in work’ approach - Identify suitable tasks and hours - Keep in touch - Develop rehab plan with employee and rehab coordinator
If Off Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keep in touch with work - Attend work meetings, training updates and social events - Stay active 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop return to work plan with employee and rehab coordinator - Keep in touch with employee
Return to work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gradually increase hours and tasks - Continue as many activities as possible - Stay active 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Arrange worksite assessment - Identify and provide suitable tasks - Start return to work plan - Continue and monitor return to work plan

Key Features for Optimising Health

- Identify important or treatable conditions and refer for appropriate treatment early on - these are red flags.
- Symptom control where necessary such as regular Paracetamol
- Maintain all normal activities, including work!
- A 'rest only' approach is unlikely to solve the problem
- Look for other factors such as psychosocial - these are yellow flags (see below)
- In the absence of any treatable condition reassurance should be given that there is no serious problem / pathology.

Barriers to Optimising Health

Sometimes there are other things going on in our lives, like problems at work or home, that make coping with discomfort harder. These are called Yellow Flags. It is very uncommon that a single factor is the only cause of musculoskeletal symptoms. You may need to look at a whole range of factors that could be contributing to your discomfort. Managing the causes of your discomfort can be a long process that requires dedication. However, the rewards are very real and well worth the effort in the long run.

For more information on red and yellow flags refer to the ACC Acute Low Back Pain Management Patient Guide (ACC 526).

If you need advice or help with your musculoskeletal health you can contact your Burwood Hospital:

- Line Manager
- Health and Safety Advisor
- Rehabilitation Coordinator
- Human Resources Advisor
- Workplace Support Services or E.A.P.

Booklets & Publications

The following resources are available from the Allan Bean Centre Library and Main Entrance Reception.

- New Zealand Acute Low Back Pain Guide
- Guide to Assessing Psychosocial Yellow Flags in Acute Low Back Pain
- Patient Guide - Acute Low Back Pain Management
- ACC publication – Active and Working - Managing Acute low Back Pain in the Workplace - an employers guide.
- Preventing Occupational Overuse - a handbook for coordinators.
- Pocket Ergonomist
- How to use your VDU Safely (available in the Burwood OSH Manual)
- Desktop Ergonomics on your CDHB NetWare

Correct Sitting Posture



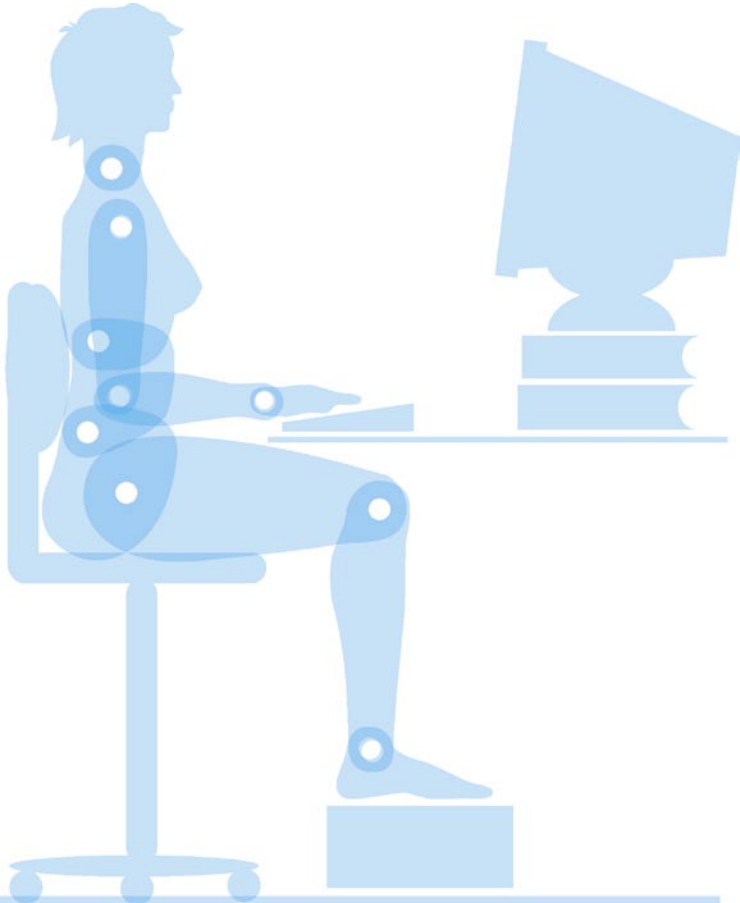
- Your hip, knee and ankle joints should all be at approximately 90 degrees with your feet flat on the floor.
- Adjust the seat height to remove pressure underneath your thighs.
- Adjust the back rest so that it sits comfortably in the small of your back.
- Use the back of the chair to support your back.

Correct Keyboard and Screen Height



- Relax your shoulders and let your arms hang down, bend your elbows until your arms are at 90 degrees, your finger tips should touch the key board.
- You should not need to bend your wrists up or down to touch the keys.
- Your hip, knee and ankle joints should all be at approximately 90 degrees.
- Still in the relaxed position, place the monitor at arms length away, your outstretched fingers should just miss the top of the screen.
- With your head, neck and back straight but still relaxed the top of the screen should be at eye level.

Fixed Desk Height



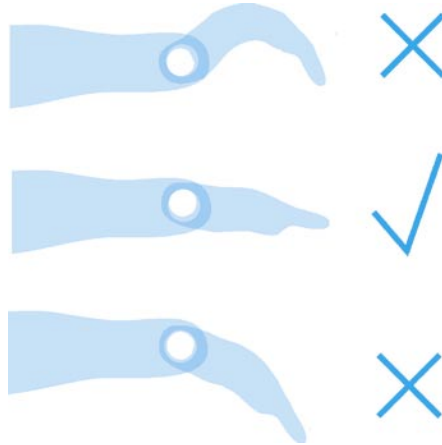
If the desk is too high raise your chair height and use a foot rest so that your hip, knee and ankle joints are all at approximately 90 degrees.

- Relax your shoulders and let your arms hang down, bend your elbows until your arms are at 90 degrees, your finger tips should touch the key board.
- You should not need to bend your wrists up or down to touch the keys
- Still in the relaxed position place the monitor at arms length away, your outstretched fingers should just miss the top of the screen.
- With your head, neck and back straight but still relaxed the top of the screen should be at eye level.

NOTE: If the fixed desk height is too low you will need to raise the desk by placing blocks under each corner until the correct posture is achieved.

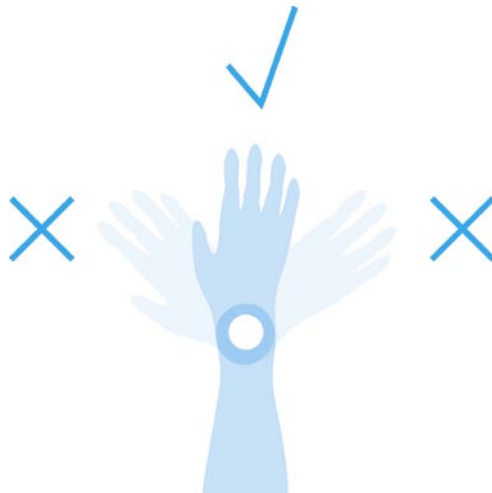
Wrist Angle for Keyboard use

- Do not bend your wrists up or down to touch the keyboard, your wrist should always be straight.



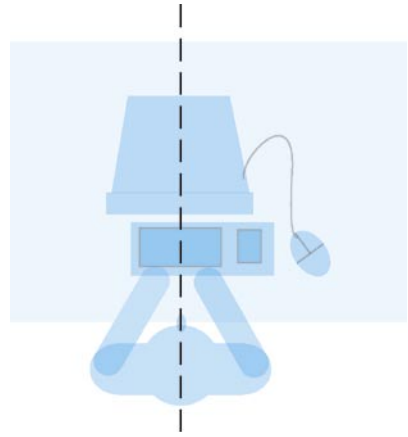
Wrist Angle for Mouse use

- Do not bend your wrist left or right to use your mouse, your wrist should always be in a neutral position.



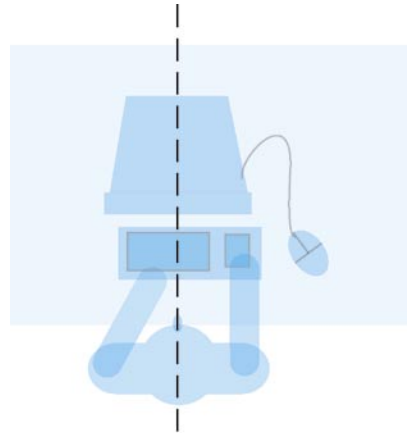
Keyboard

When you are predominately using the keyboard for writing, centre it in front of you. Imagine an invisible line through the centre of the screen, the keyboard and you.



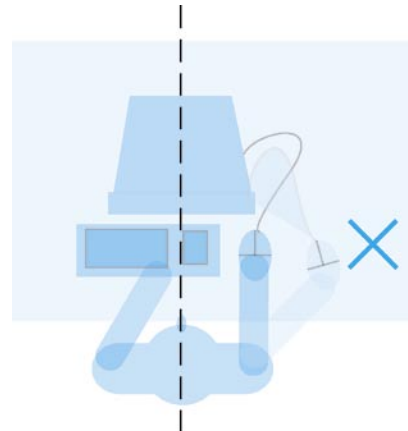
Numbers

When you are predominately using the numbers for numeric entry, move the numbers pad so that you can use it without reaching to the side.



Mouse

When you are predominately using the mouse, position it so that you can operate it without having to reach to the side.



The Bigger Picture

Making it easy for you to Optimise your Health

FOUR DIMENSIONS

Physical

Eating well, adequate sleep, regular exercise, drinking water.

Emotional

Having fun, releasing endorphins, positive feelings, people for support

Mental

Planning & prioritising your workload i.e: giving yourself enough time to do the important things, good communication

Spiritual

Reflect on why you are here, celebrate events.

*If you continue to experience discomfort,
get some assistance.*

This assistance can be from either your

Line Manager

Health & Safety Advisor

Rehab Coordinator

Human Resources Advisor

*An individual assessment to identify
your specific needs can be arranged.*

Authorised by: General Manager Burwood Hospital: Swim Team

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