



PHOTO: RAJ K. RAJ, MODEL: JASMINE, COURTESY: GLITZ

Wellness

THE PAINFUL TRUTH

Daily routine activities could, over time, cause you serious injury. Here's how to prevent these disorders

by Veenu Singh

FOR IT professional Smriti Bhalla, work involves long hours in front of the computer. So at the end of the day, Bhalla is more than just ordinarily tired. "I have a burning sensation in my eyes and my neck hurts so much, I have to take medicine or use a hot water bottle to kill the pain," says Bhalla.

ALL PAIN, NO GAIN
All corporate warriors suffer the same ills - tired eyes, aching necks, shoulders and backs, and wrist and finger pain. All caused by extended stints in front of computer screens, poor posture and lack of exercise. These are called Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSDs). "MSD refers to a range of soft tissue disorders, such as those affecting spinal discs, muscles, joints, cartilage, nerves, blood vessels, tendons or ligaments," says Dr Rajiv Thukral, consultant, orthopaedic, Max Healthcare. "Carpal tunnel syndrome is an example. One cause of MSDs is repetitive motion. Disorders involving repetitive activities are called repetitive strain injuries (RSIs). These are the accumulation of small injuries suffered during routine activities. Sometimes the accumulation of injury can outpace the ability of the body to heal itself, leading to a potentially serious injury."

BE AWARE
Since these injuries develop slowly, they can be difficult to identify. So we work through the pain. But if they develop into full MSD, they can be difficult to treat. "The excessive use of your hands - especially the wrist and arm - causes injury to them," says Dr Vijay Sheel Kumar, neurologist and chairman of Doctor Kares Hospital, Gurgaon. "Sports like tennis, which involve repetitive motions, can also lead to RSIs. If you play musical instruments or video games, you are also at risk." Symptoms of RSI include tingling, numbness or pain in the affected area, stiff or sore necks or backs, feelings of weakness in the hands or arms and popping sensations.

FIGHT BACK
Warm-up exercises before starting exercise are essential to prevent RSI. Stretch every part of your body as much as possible. "Even blinking your eyes and moving your head regularly helps," says Dr Thukral. "Do not work continuously in the same pattern," adds Dr Manoj Kumar, consultant orthopaedic surgeon, Moolchand Medicity. And improper posture can cause serious neck, back, shoulder or ankle injuries. However, ergonomically designed office equipment can help reduce the chance of MSDs.

MAKE THEM WORK
The HP Adjustable Notebook Stand (top) and the Wireless Laser Desktop Keyboard (above)

Ergonomic keyboards: "Keyboards are split so each half better accommodates the natural posture of each arm," says Ashim Mathur, national marketing manager, Microsoft Entertainment and Devices, India. "Such keyboards also have easier access to keys that reduces friction," adds Dr Harshvardhan Hegde, head, orthopaedics and spine surgery, Artemis Health Institute, Gurgaon. **Mouse:** An ergonomically designed mouse makes sure the alignment of the wrist on it is comfortable. "Use a mouse even with a laptop. It helps reduce the tension on your wrist," says Dr Kumar. **Laptop stand:** The HP Adjustable Notebook Stand "encourages better seating posture by elevating the notebook to eye level. It supports arms and wrists," says Deepak Jagtiani, country manager, accessories, personal systems group, HP India. **Office chair:** Sitting for hours stresses out the spine. So the office chair should support the lower back and promotes good posture. "The armrests should be adjustable. The elbows and lower arms should rest lightly, and the forearm should not be on the armrest while typing," says Dr Hegde.

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STOP IT!

- Don't remain in one position for extended periods of time
- When doing your daily tasks, alternate between sitting and standing
- Use a rolled towel or lumbar pad to support the lower back when you sit
- Don't slouch against armrests
- Take a break every half an hour, walk around and stretch
- Don't pound at the keyboard
- To align your arms properly, your keyboard should be 1 or 2 inches above your thighs