

IMPROVING COMFORT

A worker was experiencing low back discomfort and muscle strain between shoulders and neck when at his computer workstation. After placing a foot rest so that he could raise his chair to bring his elbows to keyboard height and adjusting his arm rests to support his forearms in a relaxed arm position while using the keyboard and mouse, he had no further reports of discomfort a week later.

CHANGING THE WAY WE USE FOREARM SUPPORT

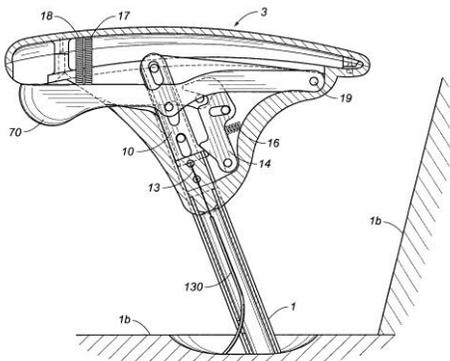
Every once in a while we hear new information that refutes a long standing belief about the correct way to do a task. Those of us with a little more gray in our hair receive this new information with ‘a grain of salt’, waiting to see if it is going to change direction again or hold its course as truth.

I recently came across new information on an old topic that carried the ring of truth based on my personal experience. Over years of conducting office ergonomic assessments I regularly encounter the question, “Should I use my arm rests or not?”

Traditional information tells us that the forearms should ‘float’ over the keyboard when typing. Nicola Green with Wellnomics Limited from New Zealand produced a white paper describing current evidence and implications of ‘Forearm support during keyboard and mouse use’. She points to increased research in the last ten years about this question with a summary of the evidence that it produced.

Key Point: “Using forearm support during keyboard and mouse use reduces postural load on the neck/shoulder and lower back muscles.”

– Nicola Green



The author concludes that “Forearm support is the most significant factor in optimal positioning for the neck, shoulder, arm and hand during keyboard and mouse use.” And “Using forearm support when using the keyboard and mouse decreases the risk of developing computer related discomfort.”



GENERAL GUIDELINES TO SET UP YOUR WORKSTATION

First adjust your chair seat and back to fit and provide slightly reclined (5°) postural support.

Sit so that your hips and back are against the backrest, then slide your chair in as close as you can to your workstation. Pull your keyboard and mouse close.

Set your keyboard tray or adjust the height of your chair if the keyboard is on the desktop so that your elbow is at keyboard height when sitting supported in your chair.

Adjust your armrest to support your arms in a relaxed position. The forearm support may contact the lower half of the forearm to the wrist, or may include the upper half of the forearm up to the elbow. The support may come from the arm rests or from the desktop, but does not refer to the use of gel wrist rests adjacent to the keyboard or their equivalent.

Ensure that your monitor is adjusted so that the top of the screen is at or slightly below eye level. Place frequently referenced documents on an angled document holder between your monitor and the keyboard.

THE FINAL WORD

The bottom line of this discussion is that supporting the forearms when doing computer keying and mouse work is required to ensure good working technique at your computer workstation.

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References

Green, Nicola. (2012) Forearm support during keyboard and mouse use Current evidence and implications, Wellnomics White Paper