

# Making Your Work Area Work for You



**R**emaining 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 breaks every 20–30 minutes.

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 document holders 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.

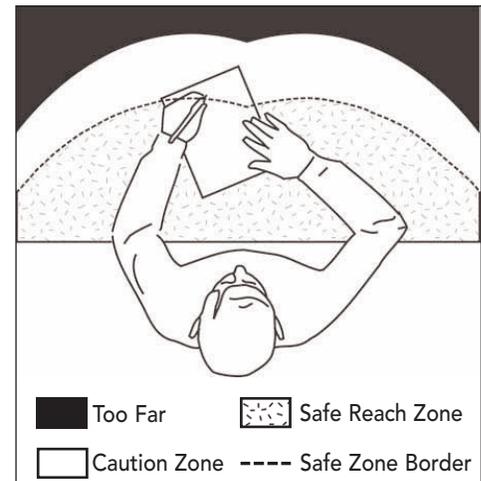
## Your upper back hurts

**Are you slouching?** Slouching can cause your chin to protrude forward or place stress on your neck and upper back. Make sure you have good low back and arm support. 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 shoulder hurts

**Do you reach out a lot?** Bring objects that you use more often closer to your body, e.g., the telephone (see Safe Reach Zone, below), move your chair closer, or stand up to reach. If you use a mouse or a calculator, bring it close to your body.



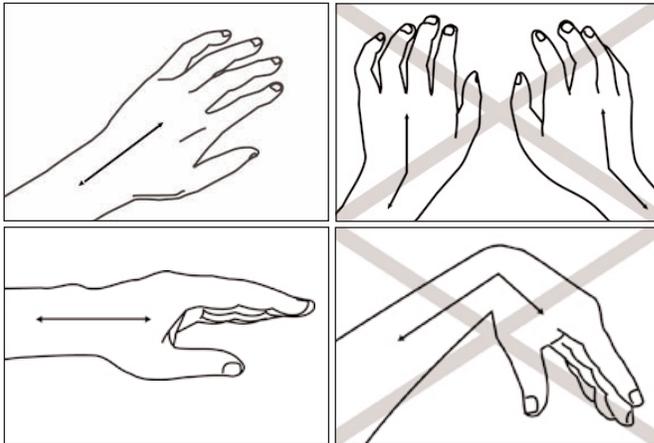
**Is your work surface too high?** Your keyboard or work surface should be low enough to allow your shoulders to be relaxed, arms at your sides, forearms about level with the floor, and wrists straight, not bent up, down, or to either side.

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.

## Your elbow hurts

**Are you gripping too hard?** Your pen, mouse, or tools should be modified to





Correct positions

Incorrect positions

allow you to use less force. The grip should be 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

**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” or “gripping” too hard?** Do your work lightly and gently, with your wrists straight.

### 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

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

- **Stand and stretch every 20–30 minutes, and recheck your posture.**
- **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.
- **Get regular aerobic exercise such as walking.** Try to walk at least 30 minutes on most days.
- **Have a co-worker watch you work.** It's helpful to have someone watch you work and make suggestions based on this handout.

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

### Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at [members.kp.org](http://members.kp.org) to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, message boards, health classes, and much more.
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.
- With a *Kaiser Permanente Healthphone Directory*, you can pick topics and messages to hear on Kaiser Permanente Healthphone (1-800-332-7563; TTY: 1-800-777-9059). Request a *Healthphone Directory* from your Health Education Center or Department or download a copy at [members.kp.org](http://members.kp.org). (Search “Healthphone”.)