



Mouse Shoulder – RSI

You may need to click on physiotherapy for relief from what one Toronto specialist calls 'Mouse Shoulder'.

"Widespread use of the computer mouse is taking its toll in increased upper body strain." says Maureen Dwight, a physiotherapist who specializes in treating repetitive strain injuries (RSI). "The mouse isn't the culprit. The problem is that we are often using a mouse without proper support for our arm".

Dwight says she is seeing growing numbers of patients suffering from 'mouse shoulder' or tendonitis (inflammation of the shoulder tendons) which sends pain radiating from the neck and shoulders down the arm and into the hand. Ice packs, modified activities and exercise to strengthen weakened muscles once the inflammation subsides generally cure the problem. "As experts in movement and mobility," Dwight says, "physiotherapists can offer advice on workplace modifications, support aids and exercise to help reduce the risks of RSI".

Repetitive strain is rapidly becoming one of the major occupational hazards of the 1990s. It already causes thousands of work related injuries annually, and that number is expected to grow as workplaces continue to automate.

While most commonly associated today with computer use, RSI afflicts workers in a wide range of fields from assembly-line production to professional athletics. It also affects various parts of the body including the back and lower limbs.

RSI, a catch-all term that applies to several conditions including tendonitis and carpal tunnel syndrome, continues to be at the centre of medical and legal controversy over its causes and cures. While the symptoms of these injuries may vary, Dwight explains, they are all caused by performing repetitive movements in a fixed position all or most of the time with only a limited range of movement.

"People have changed relatively quickly from being hunters and gathers to becoming technosedentary beings", Dwight says. "We are forcing our small muscle groups to perform the kind of prolonged activities which are the job of big muscle groups".

Recently two U.S. workers suffering from RSI were awarded a multi-million dollar legal settlement.

Dwight, whose patients include news reporters, corporate executives and concert musicians as well as computer hackers, says there are simple ways to prevent and reduce computer-related RSI including changing work habits and improving posture.

For example, you can click in comfort by supporting your arm on a large surface or on the arm of your chair if it is level with your desk. You might consider buying a commercially available support device to do the job. Select one that feels comfortable and allows you to keep your arm in a relaxed position, Dwight advises.

Another frequent RSI injury is often self-inflicted rather than a consequence of computer use.

Cradling a telephone between the shoulder and the ear so that you can talk while you work on your computer is "a recipe for disaster", Dwight says. "This is probably the most important thing I tell my clients to stop doing". Keeping the phone in this position causes neck compression (injury to the neck joints) that can result in headaches as well as pain in the area of the neck, shoulder blades and arm.