

Keeping Healthy with OPTM Sports Therapy

Ergonomics

A very common concern that we hear about from people regards the ergonomics of their daily activities. This includes working at a desk, lifting, reading, standing and many other tasks. There are four general rules for the protection of joints and soft tissues that can be helpful for any activity.

1. Joints and muscles are under the least stress when in a mid-range position. Avoid sustained positioning at end range.
2. Joints and muscles feel best with frequent changes of position and with movement to encourage good circulation and to change positional stresses. Avoid staying in one position for more than 30 minutes.
3. The spine requires active support from the surrounding musculature for most tasks. Mid-section control must be learned.
4. Forces are better supported when near the center of gravity for the body. Carry objects near the abdomen, and keep tasks straight forward rather than out to the sides.

Sitting is the most common work position for many. Physical problems that occur with sustained sitting are well documented. Sustained sitting promotes postures which tend to yield to the path of least resistance. The slouched position may be temporarily the most comfortable because fewer muscles are working to support the spine, but this can lead to postural weaknesses and abnormalities. Most of these problems are accumulated over a long period of time with poor positioning and poor movement habits. Companies generally have ergonomic departments that will assess the workstations for employees. However, if the work station at home is poorly set up the problems still exist. Applying the rules above, a chair that fits the individual, supports the arms in midrange, and keeps the lumbar spine in a neutral position is very important. Common activities in sitting include using a computer mouse, reading, and writing.

OPTM Has a New Website

Our web site is up and running. Log on and see previous newsletters, get some exercise tips, meet our therapists, or just browse our site.

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Optimally a mouse should be used on the keyboard tray, near the center of the body, to avoid lifting the shoulder and holding the arm away from the body. Writing is best done on a sloped surface to decrease the need for bending forward. Reading is also best with the material at a slant in order to keep the neck in a neutral position. Equally important to changing the workstation, is the need to get out of the chair every thirty minutes, possibly reaching up to the ceiling to stretch the arms, legs and spine. Remembering to change activity and position frequently is perhaps the most difficult part of sitting. Computer programs exist which can periodically remind individuals to stretch, however personal responsibility is the key issue.

The postural weaknesses and abnormalities, which are caused by working at a desk, must be addressed with exercise. At OPTM our physical therapists are skilled in recognizing and correcting musculoskeletal imbalances. But just as important is training the individual to recognize and correct the habits that may be contributing to their problems.

