

# Socket Tech Talk: Ergonomics for frequent computer users

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Individuals who spend a lot of time at a computer—at work, home or both—realize physical comfort is crucial to productivity, morale and good health. However, relatively few people know how to properly set up their workstation or home office to avoid common problems such as eyestrain, neck and back pain, carpal tunnel syndrome and other serious medical conditions resulting from poor ergonomics.

Most computer users experience tension or pain, usually the result of an improperly arranged workstation. Fortunately, a few small adjustments can often result in a more comfortable work environment, as well as increased productivity, fewer missed days and other benefits to employers.

Denise Coots is a nutrition and fitness guide for employees at Socket, a Missouri-based telephone and Internet provider. She assists workers by helping them develop better eating, exercise and overall health habits, including the proper setup of their workstations for maximum ergonomic comfort.

“Many of Socket’s technical support and customer service representatives spend their days serving customers by talking on the phone and simultaneously using their computers,” said Coots. “If they don’t understand the right way to position their computers and their bodies, they could potentially experience a lot of tension and discomfort.”

Coots suggests all heavy computer users follow some basic guidelines to make time at the computer as pain-free as possible.

Proper posture is crucial, and improper chair height and position can cause neck, shoulder or back tension. The computer user should be able to sit slightly reclined with

the knees at a 90-degree angle to the floor, the lower back supported and the feet flat on the floor.

Once the chair has been properly adjusted, assure the computer monitor is positioned approximately an arm’s length away with the top of the screen at eye level. Avoid glare from lights or windows, and try to eliminate as much contrast as possible from the area surrounding the screen.

The keyboard should be positioned so the wrists are neutral while typing and not bent up or down. Shoulders should be relaxed, and the “b” key should be lined up with the user’s belly button. The mouse should be close to the keyboard and movement should originate from the elbow, not the wrist. Alternating mouse usage between both the right and left hands can ease stress on the dominant hand. Frequent computer users might first find it awkward to use the mouse with their non-dominant hand, but most will get used to it in just a few days.

Finally, if phone calls are a frequent part of the computer user’s activities, the phone should be positioned within easy reach. Avoid cradling the receiver between the head and shoulder and instead consider using a headset or speakerphone for extended or frequent calls.

By following these guidelines and taking short breaks throughout the day, Coots says most computer users should be on their way to more comfortable days at their work or home offices without breaking the bank. “Oftentimes, these adjustments are not particularly costly to an individual or business,” Coots said. “Staying healthy and happy is always worth the investment.”