

Over the last few years, computer use for teachers and community college members has increased, such as with the introduction of the SMART Board, PowerSchool, Tienet, and other computer related resources and activities. Although this technology can be an asset in some aspects of the teaching world, it may also mean that our members are spending more time in front of a computer on a regular basis. For some, prolonged computer use can lead to discomfort and can also lead to potential injuries. This may be due to the equipment set up, body positioning, pre-existing medical conditions, or a combination of many factors.

Imagine this: You are sitting in a chair at your desk at school, working on a laptop. Your back is hunched over the desk as you type on the laptop's keyboard. Your neck feels sore and your arms are cramped.

Now, take a second to consider your current posture. Does that description sound familiar? Many people do not often realize how they may be positioned at the computer until it is pointed out, or until they start feeling some sort of discomfort such as back, neck, or arm pain.

In most schools, and educational sites teachers and community college members are provided with a computer monitor, with a standard external keyboard and mouse. Some use a laptop instead, which may or may not come with external devices. "Standard" devices have a basic design and are often associated with the average set up. The benefits of standard equipment

are that they are usually easy to obtain, less expensive, and more familiar to use. However, standard equipment can be bulky and can place your body in a poor position for prolonged use. What else is out there that could be better?

Alternative computer devices can be helpful to improve ergonomic positioning while working at the computer. There are many options, but here are some commonly used examples, with points about their pros and cons for each:

Split keyboard

- ▶▶ Helps your wrists stay in a more neutral position. Also helpful for body alignment for those who have wider shoulders.
- ▶▶ It can take time to adjust to the different layout of keys, for those who are used to a standard design.

Mini keyboard

- ▶▶ For right-handed users, it allows your arm to be positioned closer to the middle of your body, as there is no number pad. It is also more portable than larger keyboards, and can fit better in smaller desk spaces.
- ▶▶ No number pad can be a disadvantage for those who type numbers frequently.
- ▶▶ Keyboard with built in mouse (ball or track pad)
- ▶▶ Since an external mouse is not needed, your arms can stay positioned closer to the middle of your body. It can also fit better in smaller desk spaces.



- ▶▶ Risk of increased hand tension when using the ball or track pad mouse.

Vertical mouse

- ▶▶ Reduces twisting of the forearm and allows a more neutral position of your wrist.
- ▶▶ Can cause the thumb and/or fingers to work harder than when using a standard mouse.

Roller mouse

- ▶▶ Allows your shoulders to stay in alignment and positioned closer to the middle of your body. You can also alternate hand use for mouse tasks.
- ▶▶ This device is placed in front of the keyboard, which moves the keyboard farther away on the desk. This may cause your body to lean forward, and your arms reach out farther to type.
- ▶▶ Proper equipment and body positioning can be very beneficial to improve your comfort and help prevent injuries

during computer use. There are many aspects to consider in addition to the computer and devices used, including the desk and chair set up. Occupational therapists can perform ergonomic assessments of your workplace, and make recommendations about what type of equipment set up and positioning techniques may work for you.

For more information, and to learn how an Occupational Therapist may be able to help you, you can call the NSTU Early Intervention Program for Teachers at 1-800-565-6788 or email eip@nstu.ca.

References:

- http://blog.pbergo.com/?p=639&utm_source=BenchmarkEmail&utm_campaign=BLOG%20E-mails&utm_medium=email
- <http://blog.pbergo.com/?p=657>
- http://www.ergoexpo.com/on-demand_webinars.html
- <http://www.thebackdoc.ca/2013/03/>

The Early Intervention Program (EIP) invites NSTU members to sign up for our Wellness email list at Be_Well@nstu.ca

Please contact Erin at ekeefe@staff.nstu.ca to provide her with your NSTU email address. This list provides information about the EIP and other wellness topics.

For previous *The Well Teacher* articles, go to www.nstu.ca