Stone Creek Silk ©

Health & Safety Stuff

Although computer work isn't dangerous in the same way as being a firefighter, there is the potential for various physical problems to develop if you don't follow a few simple recommendations. It really is worth setting your computer and seating up with care to make sure your body doesn't suffer in the long run.

- Make sure you are sitting comfortably - sitting badly for any length of time can lead to muscle and joint pain. Make sure your lower back is supported, your knees are level with your hips and your feet are flat on the floor. If you are a shortie, like me, you may need a foot rest as your feet probably don't reach the floor! It's a good idea to get up and walk round for a few minutes periodically so your muscles don't stiffen up.

- While you are using the mouse your arms should not be extended but should be relaxed with your forearms roughly parallel to the floor and the backs of your hands in line with your forearms. This will reduce stress on your wrists, a common site for Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI).

  It's also a good idea to learn some keyboard shortcuts to reduce the use of the mouse and therefore strain on your hands and arms. For instance holding the control key (Ctrl) down and pressing the p key, usually written as ctrl-P is the equivalent of selecting the Print option from the file menu.

- Your eye height should be just above the top of the screen. The tendency for people to use portable computers more and more is generating a big group of people with neck and headache problems. If you have a laptop on your lap then your neck is bent at a bad angle with you looking down for long periods. It is much better to plug a standard monitor into your portable computer so it can be placed at a suitable height.

  A monitor usually has two cables, one which supplies it with power and a data cable which plugs into your computer. There is usually only one port (socket) on your portable for you to plug your monitor cable in – a 'D' shaped socket with three rows of pins. On many portables your computer recognises that there is a monitor plugged in and automatically displays the picture. On my portable I have to hold the Fn

key down and press the F7 key on the top row of the keyboard to tell the machine to use the external monitor. Consult the manual for your computer to see what you need to do.

Try to minimise glare and reflections on the screen.

- Try and change the focus of your eyes from time to time by looking into the distance if you can as this will reduce eye strain. Do remember to blink occasionally - the tendency is to stare at the screen when you are concentrating. Contact lens wearers particularly may end up with dry, sore eyes.

- Take breaks! Short regular breaks seem to be more effective than longer infrequent ones. Stop what you are doing for a couple of minutes every half hour. If you are like me you get so absorbed in what you are doing that several hours can pass before I know what's happened. By then my back and neck have seized up, my eyes are dry and sore and I'm grumpy. If necessary set a kitchen timer!