

Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSD)

Many health problems are attributed to using computers. MSD cover a broad range of health problems: work-related upper limb disorders, commonly known as repetitive strain injuries, back pain and injuries and lower limb pain and injuries. These problems range from minor discomfort to more serious medical conditions requiring time off work, medical and hospital treatment.

A survey carried out for the Health and Safety Executive in 2003/04 reported that 2.2 million individuals in Great Britain suffered from a health problem which they thought had been caused or made worse by current or previous employment. MSD was the most commonly reported type of work-related health problem with 1, 108, 000 individuals being affected (2004:25).

Factors which considerably increase the risk of computing-related MSD are poor posture, inadequate workstations and pressure of work.

Poor posture can be improved by touch typing. One of the most important benefits of touch typing is the improvement in posture - no more looking down at the copy then back to the keyboard, a factor that will significantly reduce shoulder and neck pain. Other benefits include greater accuracy and increased productivity. For example, a non-typist probably averages 10 words per minute which means, keying in a 2,500 word assignment will take over 4 hours with additional time for proof reading, correcting, revision and editing.

A touch typist who can average a modest 40 words per minute will take just over an hour to type 2,500 words. This is four times as fast, and since the typist will have greater accuracy less time will be required for proof reading and corrections.

This type of comparison makes the 16-20 hours that it takes to learn keyboard layout seem very cost/time effective. With 16-20 hours of training, a dedicated learner will cover the letter keys, punctuation marks and upper and lower case letters. Subsequent practice will consolidate the keyboarding skills and, gradually, typing speed will increase.