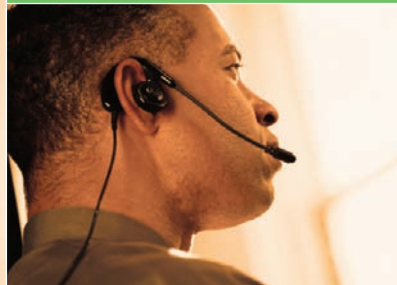




THE CHARTERED SOCIETY OF PHYSIOTHERAPY

# FIT to WORK



Chartered physiotherapists offer advice and treatment for a range of health problems to help you make the most of your lifestyle





Many of us spend our working days carrying out repetitive activities in awkward and or static postures. If we do not sit properly, take regular breaks and use correctly positioned furniture and equipment, we can become vulnerable to pain and discomfort. Common problems include a range of work-related upper limb disorders (WRULDs), such as pain in the limbs, fingers, wrists, forearms, neck and shoulders. These conditions are usually related to overuse and can become debilitating if left untreated.

According to the Health and Safety Executive, almost half a million British workers now suffer from these symptoms. In 2003/4 this resulted in the loss of 4.7 million working days.

The good news is that WRULDs are preventable and chartered physiotherapists can successfully treat the symptoms and identify some of the possible causes. This leaflet has been compiled with the help of physiotherapists specialising in occupational health and ergonomics. It is designed to help you identify your risk and offers simple exercises you can follow to help prevent the onset of problems.

## Risk factors

WRULDs can affect people in many types of work, including those who spend long periods at their desks and production workers who frequently repeat the same patterns of movements. It can even cause problems for drivers and those who play musical instruments or participate in sport. Key risk factors:

- > prolonged maintenance of awkward or static postures
- > high rates of repetition
- > frequent exertion of force
- > heavy lifting or handling.



Even stress, which causes muscles to tense, can be a contributing factor, as can adverse working environments, such as those that are too hot or too cold.

## What can your employer do?

Your employer should be keen to cut your risk of WRULDs because a healthy workforce is generally motivated and productive.

They should provide:

- > workstation risk assessments conducted by trained risk assessors
- > changes to workstations where necessary, based on sound ergonomic principles
- > changes to work patterns if needed, such as a wider variety of tasks, job rotation and regular breaks from computer-based or repetitive work
- > appropriate information and training on safe computer use
- > eye tests for those using display screens, and spectacles if special lenses are needed
- > encouragement to take allocated breaks.

## What can you do?

Aim for a good balance between sitting and moving around your work environment and if possible, vary your tasks. Performing a few simple exercises (see poster overleaf) every hour or so can help reduce your risk of developing work-related aches and pains. You'll also boost your circulation, which sends more oxygen to your brain and helps you stay alert.

If you are experiencing any WRULDs, take an active role by seeking advice and help early. It is your responsibility to inform your employer if you have any concerns or discomfort.

## How can physiotherapy help?

Many physiotherapists have specialist occupational health expertise. They can advise on ergonomics, risk assessment and management relating to workers and their activities, including manual handling.

Physiotherapists are also involved in rehabilitation and will provide a programme of treatment to suit your needs. They will ask you for a full history of any symptoms and discuss workplace risk, your hobbies and any stress factors. The physiotherapist will analyse your posture and offer corrective advice and exercises. They will also look at ways to improve your working practices.

## Protecting the next generation

Nowadays, young children are tapping away at computer keyboards, using mobile phones and playing video games. The increasing use of computers in schools and at home means they are also at risk of computer-related musculoskeletal aches and pains.

Parents, carers and teachers have a responsibility to ensure the principles of good ergonomics are applied at home and in the classroom. Ensuring that children know how to sit correctly, vary their activities and build plenty of physical activity into their daily lives can help minimise the risk of developing common conditions associated with modern computer use.

## Where can I receive treatment?

You'll find chartered physiotherapists in NHS and private hospitals, health centres, GP practices, industry, schools, leisure centres and some will visit you in your own home.

The majority of physiotherapists work in the NHS, but others have their own private practices. You can make an appointment directly with a chartered physiotherapist yourself, or your GP can refer you. You can search for a physiotherapist in private practice in your area by using the CSP's online search facility Physio2U at: [www.physio2u.org.uk](http://www.physio2u.org.uk). When choosing a physiotherapist make sure they have the initials MCSP (Member of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy) after their name. This will guarantee that they are properly qualified, governed by a professional code of conduct and covered by professional liability insurance.

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy is the professional, educational and trade union body for the United Kingdom's 45,000 chartered physiotherapists, physiotherapy students and assistants

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