

Healthy Living

Patient Information from the American Chiropractic Association

Using Technology Safely

Mobile technological devices have made our lives more convenient. We can now send e-mails, access the Internet, manage our schedules, and use spreadsheets and other office software all from our phones. While this makes it easier to accomplish tasks without being tethered to an office, this has also increased the amount of time we spend using these devices, which is not without risks.

Before these advances in technology, our bodies moved as we used the phone and the computer, we walked to the fax machine, and we flipped through our calendars. Now we slump over a small screen with little change in our position. Our bodies are made to move—not to maintain the same stooped-over posture for long periods of time. This doesn't mean you have to sacrifice these modern conveniences for your health, but you do need to be conscious of the risks and what you can do to minimize them.

Protect Your Neck

The bent-forward position increases disc pressure. It also increases loads on the muscles. This is similar to the faulty forward position often used when watching TV and working on the computer. Remember these tips:

- Sit upright, keeping your ears over your shoulders.
- Look down with your eyes and gently tuck your chin in, not forward.
- Never pinch the phone between your ear and shoulder. Using a headset



reduces muscle fatigue and frees your hands for typing or writing.

- Support your forearms on a pillow during extended texting to reduce the strain on your neck and shoulder muscles.

Our bodies are made to move—not to maintain the same stooped-over posture for long periods of time. Be conscious of the risks involved with excessive use of PDAs or cell phones.

Prevent Elbow Injury

The ulnar, or “funny bone,” nerve wraps around the inside of your elbow. Keeping your elbows bent can compress the nerve. As the nerve becomes irritated, you can experience pain, numbness, tingling, and even weakness or muscle atrophy. The nerve sits close to the surface

and is also damaged by external pressure. To prevent the risks:

- Minimize the time you bend the elbows to hold the screen up to see it.
- Instead of returning all your e-mails on the phone, wait until you can use the computer.
- Avoid leaning on the flexed elbow while talking on the phone or in the car.

Like a Sore Thumb

Our thumbs are not made to quickly and forcefully press the small keys on cell phones to text and input data. Use the following tips to minimize the risk of injury:

- Alternate among using your thumb, index finger, and a stylus, if available.
- If your only choice is a stylus, change how you hold it. Switch between holding it like a pen and holding it between the index and middle fingers.
- Several multi-tip pens are available at office supply stores that allow you to switch between pen and stylus tips. This is a good option, as the barrel of the pen is thicker than a standard stylus and requires less force on the joints and muscles.
- Minimize the use of scroll wheels as they often cause inflammation of thumb tendons.

Tips to Minimize PDA and Cell Phone Use

- Return only urgent e-mails on the PDA. Respond to other e-mails from your computer.
- Use key shortcuts (cut, paste, etc.) and abbreviations.
- Enter all contact info on the computer, and synchronize the devices to transfer the data to the PDA.
- Monitor the time spent on the phone or PDA.
- Avoid, or at least minimize, using word processing and spreadsheet programs on your PDA.
- Take breaks to stretch and shake out the hands.
- Turn the PDA off when possible! If it is on all the time, it's more likely to be over-used.

As technology progresses, there are likely to be more and more tasks we will be able to complete on our phones. While it is convenient, remember to take a break and think about the effects on your body. ■



For more information on prevention and wellness, or to find a doctor of chiropractic near you, go to the Patient Information section on ACA's Web site at www.acatoday.org or call 800-986-4636.

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