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COMPUTER, PHONE USE CAN LEAD TO INJURY

The advance of computer age communication has built new speed and convenience into the lives of millions of people. Unfortunately, the new technology is opening the door for people to encounter new injuries brought on by repetitive movements and bad posture while engaged in using these electronic devices.

Injuries suffered by Internet users have already been given a name. It's known as Repetitive Surf Injury (RSI). Interesting statistics presented by the British Chiropractic Association (BCA) show that in the United Kingdom there are some 8 million people who use the computer while on the go. Injuries have already been reported by over a half a million people resulting in 5.4 million workdays lost to RSI.

In Europe, the BCA has joined forces with Yahoo! to alert people to the potential health problems that could result from computer use. The aim is to get people to think with better posture and with bringing variety to the repetitive movements used especially when operating a browser on a mobile phone.

“As chiropractors we are finding that when on the move, people are balancing laptops on their legs so users stare down at the screen which in turn puts strain on their necks, shoulders and backs,” said Tim Hutchful, D.O. of BCA. “Holding your head and neck in this unsupported position can place increased load on the joints of the neck and reduce blood flow to the surrounding muscles causing inflammation, stiffness and pain.”

Phone technology with built-in browsers and smaller keyboards and buttons so close together is also a RSI source, according to Dr. Hutchful. “Small, fine movements tend to aggravate more than larger movements and this, coupled with the smaller buttons, can lead to injury as smaller buttons are harder to activate. These movements may cause a lack of blood flow to the tendons and muscles of the thumb and may cause inflammation of the joint at the base of the thumb.”

Here are some suggestions for health and injury free laptop use from BCA:

- ◆ Rest a laptop on a table, not your lap.
- ◆ If you must use it on your lap, change positions often and don't just stare down at it with your head unsupported.
- ◆ Sit in a relaxed but upright position in a chair with the bottom of your back and shoulder blades both touching the chair back when using a computer.

When using mobile phones:

- ◆ Swap your hands regularly and vary the fingers used to punch the keys.
- ◆ Massage your arm and wrist from time to time.
- ◆ Flex your hand muscles occasionally to keep the blood flowing.

With laptop and cell phone use having exploded worldwide, it is up to the individual user to heed the advice of the BCA professionals to keep a body free of RSI. It's good to know that some common sense approaches to good posture, stretching and flexing can help. For more advice on the subject of good posture, exercise and injury-free living, a chiropractor is the right person to see.