

KIDS ON COMPUTERS

Are you 'sharing' your home computer with the kids? Have you watched how they position themselves there and how focused they can become for long periods?

It may come as a surprise to learn that research reports increasingly show that many children experience moderate to high back and neck discomfort. We still do not know the impact of prolonged screen-based activities on children's eyes, however general advice says that maintaining a fixed focal length (as in looking at a screen) will increase visual fatigue.

Another simple solution is to get kids to move more often, and we can all benefit from that! But movement is not everything, as important as it is. Set a plan with them to take breaks every 20 – 30 minutes, ride their bike, play some ball games or do a job between computer sessions.

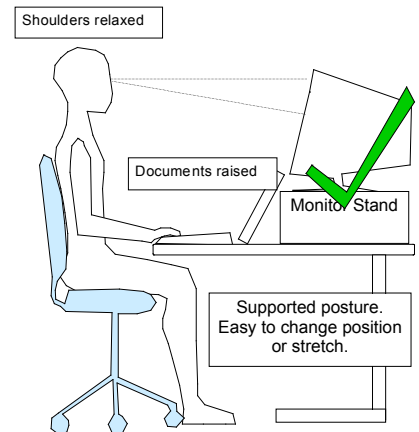
When working at the computer the "still posture" needs to be correctly supported. Children are not simply "little adults". They do not have the same muscle and bone proportions and the shape of their bones (for example the vertebra in children) is different to adults. Their body structure is altering as they grow and prolonged postural loading can influence that development.

If your children are working at a computer while sitting on a kitchen chair, floor, bed or other place where support is low, and if they are doing it for periods of more than around half an hour, it is quite possible they are building up postural loading that will lead to discomfort and injury in their future.



THE SAME PRINCIPLES APPLY TO CHILDREN AS THEY DO TO ADULTS.

- The screen should be directly in front to eliminate twisting of the neck and trunk.
- The feet should be well supported with the knees level or slightly below the hips.
- The seat should fit the child so the back can be supported.
- The back rest should maintain a curve similar to when the child is standing
- The mouse should comfortably fit the child's palm (i.e. a small mouse)
- The mouse and keyboard should be in place so the child's arms are relaxed by their side while working
- The screen should be at a comfortable height for the child to avoid neck bending or stretching
- Any papers used by the children should be angled between the screen and keyboard.



Well supported positions that meet the changing shape of the child are really important, even for short periods. You will also be doing them the favour of educating them about their own ergonomic needs while they are young enough to listen to you!

SCHOOL ERGONOMICS PROGRAMS

GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

With the number of computers in classrooms increasing every day, many schools are beginning to institute ergonomics programs to show students, teachers, and parents how to reduce the risks of computer-related injuries.

What follows is part of such an ergonomics program, in the form of guidelines that have been developed for the parents of school children, from the needs identified by a project with Blackwell Elementary School in Redmond, Washington.

The guidelines have been included in the "Get Techfit" program developed by Diane Tien and her class at this school.

KEY TOPICS

1. Risks of Keyboarding
2. Preventing Injury
3. Taking Breaks
4. Workstation Exercises
5. So You Don't Have the Ideal Workstation, Huh?
6. Laptops And Their Inherent "Un-Ergonomic Design"
7. Ergonomic Gizmos: Are They Worth It?
8. The Real Truth About The Most Popular Ergonomic Products
9. Children's Special Concerns
10. Ergonomic Redesign Of Workstations
11. Websites For More Information Regarding Workstations
12. Heavy Backpacks: To Carry or Not To Carry



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