Publication: The Indian Express	Date: 11-April-10
Page Number: 6	Edition: Delhi

The Indian EXPRESS
6 you.tech 11 APRIL 2010

The art of POSTURING

Stress caused by computers is on the rise, but the right posture and good accessories can save you some pain

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AT TIMES, working on the computer can be a pain, quite literally. Most of us tend to slump on our chairs within a few minutes, giving ourselves awkward postures which we tend to maintain for hours. Everything from the computer monitor to the mouse and keyboard we use will lead to aches and pains, even muscular damage.

With the increasing instances of work-related musculoskeletal damage, many companies are focusing on creating ergonomic designs. Ergonomics is the science of how the human body does work; it studies body mechanics of how tissues and muscles work together and looks for ways to prevent musculoskeletal disorders, or MSDs, that can cause pain. "Our focus in ergonomics is helping people work safely and avoid injury, but this almost a lot more than that. Designing for the way people work also means making work more fun, more comfortable, and more efficient," says Jasmine Yu, Director, Hardware of Microsoft Operations, which recently announced a slew of ergonomic products.

A look at what's worth your screentime and products that can reduce pain and musculoskeletal damage

THE COMPUTER MONITOR

The computer monitor should be placed 18 to 28 inches from the head, anything closer can lead to eye fatigue. The ideal distance will depend on the length of the user's arms and ability to read comfortably. The user's body and the PC must be placed in a same line and ensure that the top edge of the screen is at or below eye level.

Almost all monitors available in the market have ergonomic designs, just make sure that you position them correctly, reducing exposure to compelling reflexes, inapt postures, and overhead glare.

To optimise your monitor further, change the font size to what is best for you to read. Adjust brightness, it should be enough to see easily but not blurry. Screen should be crisp and sharp. Screen flicker too should be rid, and being so, the screen refresh rate should be between 70-80 Hertz per second. You can change this at screen setting> advanced> monitor.

THE KEYBOARD

The user's forearms and wrists should be level while using a keyboard. Tilt is best up or down you put pressure on your wrists and forearms. While working, only your lower back and posterior should come in contact with the chair. Feet should lie flat on the floor, not more bent or pushed back behind a chair. Shoulders must be aligned with the keyboard and mantime, head directly above balance. Traditional keyboards have higher keys in the back than in the front, causing you have to angle your palms and fingers upward while ergonomic keyboards have a flat design that lets your wrists stay in a more neutral position.

The basic Microsoft Wired Keyboard 200 (Rs 800) features a low light adjustable feet that give you the ideal position for typing. The more advanced Wireless Desktop 5000 (Rs 3,190 with mouse) has a comfort curve design that encourages natural hand and wrist positioning for comfort and productivity. Logitech's wireless MX 901 (Rs 2,995), on the other hand, boasts a built-in mouse in the form of an 880-DPI touchball and click keys on both sides.

Taking it a step further is the Logitech cordless desktop MX 5500 Revolution with a self-lean keystroke that helps position your hands comfortably on the keyboard. Its comfort curve design keeps you from having to twist into an unnatural position while typing and the gently curving rests of keys support the natural resting position of your hands without splitting the keyboard. However, this superior ergonomics will cost you Rs 11,495.

THE MOUSE

You might not have a thought of it, but the mouse too has a high risk factor. Repetitive actions on the mouse can lead to stress disorders like tendonitis and carpal tunnel syndrome. Plus the awkward posture of holding the mouse can cause contact stress. So it is important to find the ideal height, distance and angle at which to hover the mouse.

Microsoft's Wireless mobile Mouse 4000 and Optical Mouse 200 (Rs 650) have both been designed to give a perfect angle and grip — they also give a familiar shape for either hand. But the ideal angle for the hand would be that of a handshake, and this is what Logitech's Performance Mouse MX (1,995) recreates. It also has an added non-slip rubber grip to increase friction and makes it easier to hold and grab without squeezing, while the profile reduces the angle you need to extend your wrist. But the Performance mouse is priced at a steep Rs 7,995.

LAPTOPS

Those using notebooks and netbooks must also be careful of their posture. Often the angle at which you type on the notebook can cause musculoskeletal disorders. It is better to use a case to raise the screen to an optimal viewing position if you work on the notebook for long hours.

Logitech's Notebook Riser N110 (Rs 1,595), for instance, features an adjustable tilt — with 20-, 30- and 40-degree angles — and a rubber-coated metal base, so you can choose the position that best suits you.

Now, just sit straight and work. ◆