



Pain-Free Studying

University students commonly experience pain associated with studying. This problem can follow you throughout your lifetime, so understanding how studying is connected to pain and how you can prevent pain is important.

Common Pain and Discomfort Associated with Studying

- Neck Pain and Headaches
- Shoulder Pain
- Arm Pain
- Back Pain
- Hand Pain and Numbness

Common Causes of Pain When Studying

- Staying in one position for long periods of time
- Doing the same action repetitively (clicking a mouse, typing keys)
- Studying with poor posture
- Setting up your study space incorrectly
- Carrying too much weight in your backpack

Tips for Managing Your Pain

- **Pay attention to your body** — When you feel your body getting sore or uncomfortable, take action to prevent pain and injuries from occurring.
- **Exercise** - Exercising can reduce neck and shoulder pain associated with studying. Be sure to incorporate some form of exercise into your schedule, especially around exam time.
- **Take breaks** — Getting up and moving away from your workstation can prevent pain and repetitive strain injuries. Take 30-second breaks every 20 minutes.
 - If remembering to take breaks is difficult for you, set an alarm or download reminder software.
 - Gently stretching your neck, back, shoulders, arms, and wrists during breaks can prevent or reduce stiffness and pain related to studying.
- **Use proper posture** — Proper posture is important for preventing musculoskeletal strain and repetitive strain injuries while studying. Here are some tips for maintaining proper posture, particularly while using a computer or laptop.
 - When viewing a screen, your neck should be straight.
 - When typing, elbows should be close to your sides and at the same height as the keyboard.
 - Forearms, wrists, and hands should be kept as relaxed as possible; avoid typing with too much force or gripping your mouse too tightly.



- Wrists should be kept straight or slightly pointed downward when typing; wrists should be elevated when typing, not resting on an armrest or table.
- Knees should be bent at 90 degrees with a 2 to 4-inch gap between the back of the knees and the front edge of the chair.
- Feet should be placed flat on the floor or on a footrest.
- **Set up your study space** - Setting up your study space properly will prevent unnecessary strain on your body that leads to pain.
 - Do not study in bed or on the couch; instead, sit in a well-supported chair.
 - Your computer chair should be adjustable with padded armrests, have an adjustable height option and provide lower back support so you can have proper posture (as outlined above).
 - If your chair does not have lower back support, you can purchase one or use a small pillow or rolled up towel behind your lower back.
 - Frequently used desk items should be within easy reach to reduce fatigue and risk of injury.
 - Position your computer or laptop screen at eye level.
 - Your keyboard should be kept flat or sloped slightly downward (i.e. highest end closest to you).
 - Your mouse should be positioned close to the keyboard.
- **Use backpack ergonomics** - Using a backpack properly can reduce pain and tension for students.
 - Limit your backpack weight to no more than 10% of your body weight.
 - Carry your backpack on both shoulders with the straps tightened.
 - Backpack straps should be adjustable and padded.
 - The backpack should not hang more than 4 inches below the waistline.
 - When picking up the backpack, bend at the knees rather than the waist.
 - Remove any items that you do not need on a daily basis.
 - If you need a lot of items for classes (eg. textbooks, lab equipment, etc.), get a locker to store heavier items.



Resources that Informed this Handout

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