

Wrist Rests

What is a "wrist rest"?

A wrist rest is a device used to support a keyboardists' wrists while typing (Figure 1) or when using a computer mouse (Figure 2).

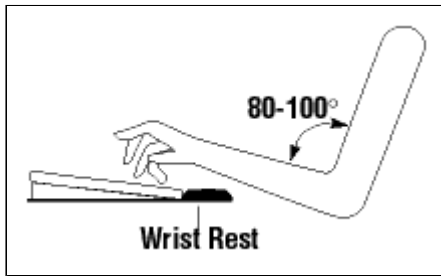


Figure 1

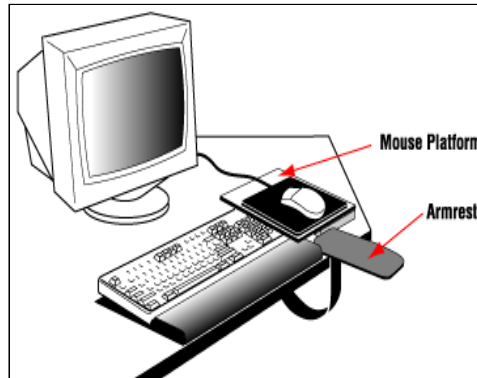


Figure 2

Do "wrist rests" work?

Debate surrounds the use of wrist rests for typists and other workers who perform repetitive tasks with their hands from a sitting position for extended periods.

On one side of the debate, it is known that leaning the wrists on a wrist rest or the edge of the desk for long periods can put a lot of pressure on the undersides of the wrists. This may cause carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS) to develop. On the other hand, evidence shows that wrist rests alleviate tension in the neck and shoulders, thus alleviating the risk for musculoskeletal injury in such jobs.

Both views can be challenged.

Why is there a debate?

Contact between the wrists and wrist rest, if too frequent or too heavy, can indeed cause problems due to excessive pressure on the delicate tendons on the underside of the wrist, and has been known to result in CTS and tenosynovitis (inflammation of the sheath surrounding tendons). This may be what has led people to believe that wrist rests should not be used. However, the problem was more serious when the importance of properly adjusted workstations was not fully understood. In many cases, desks were too high for comfort, and consequently most workers had to rest their wrists against the sharp edges of a desk. They did not have the advantage of padded wrist rests that supported a larger area of the wrist.

Now that the adjustable workstation is becoming standard throughout most offices, the problem is not as critical. A worker with a properly adjusted chair and desk might need only very light wrist support. Even minimal support for the forearms or wrists with arm rests and wrist rests can take a lot of muscular tension out of the neck, shoulders and arms,

without subjecting other parts of the body to unnecessary pressure or strain.

Should I get a wrist rest?

For tasks that involve working with shoulders raised, elbows held out, arms held forward and wrists held up (as in typing, micro-electronics assembly, etc.), any means of reducing muscular tension is of critical importance in preventing musculoskeletal injuries.

One's personal preference for using or not using a wrist rest is a very significant factor. Workers who choose not to use them while actually performing their tasks may opt to just use them for a rest break, between tasks. An adjustable workstation which is suited to the individual using is essential. A wrist rest will not solve problems if the workstation is poorly designed in the first place.

Credit: Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety