

Signs and Symptoms of our Texting times

Although texting and tapping in front of a screen is not particularly hazardous for an employee or student who does them only occasionally, the situation becomes more critical when done for long periods each day. The Canadian Internet Registration Authority reports that nearly 3 out of every 4 Canadians [spend at least 3-4 hours online each day](#). Almost half use a smartphone, tablet or other mobile device to access the internet, and that number continues to climb as desktop computer usage steadily declines.

The resulting injuries from these mobile devices rarely originate from a single event or cause, but rather are the result of a combination of factors including fixed postures which are awkward, uncomfortable, and maintained for too long a time. Add in repetitive, deliberate movements and a high or constant pace of work, and the resulting stress can cause body muscles to tense up. Tense muscles increase the risk for these ergonomic injuries.

Text neck and texting thumb

According to Statistics Canada, [76% of Canadians owned a smartphone in 2016](#). Text neck results from positioning our necks in an unnatural position - usually downward - to view mobile devices. Over time, the pressure placed on your neck can lead to pain, pinched nerves, herniated discs and other issues.

Constant texting and sending emails over long periods using smartphones can also lead to texting thumb, an overuse injury that affects the tendons running along the thumb side of the wrist. Symptoms include swelling, pain and reduced function.

Employee/students can be mindful of maintaining a healthy position by holding their phones in front of their faces, or near eye level, with their elbows relaxed below their shoulders, when working. Regular breaks away from your devices can promote blood flow and recovery, and even short micro-breaks of a few seconds can be beneficial. [Stretches and exercises to improve posture](#) can also provide relief. If you do experience pain, report your concerns to your employer and doctor.

Cellphone elbow

Employees and students who hold their elbow flexed for a long period when speaking on the phone may compress their ulnar nerve, which runs along the inside of the elbow. Known also as cubital tunnel syndrome, cellphone elbow's symptoms include numbness, tingling, burning and pain in the forearm and hand. Over time, it can lead to issues with using that hand, including fatigue, weakness, and an inability to grasp and perform various motor tasks. In most cases, changing body positions, switching hands, or using a hands-free kit are effective at treating the symptoms. As with other injuries, early identification and treatment increases the chances of a full recovery.

Digital eye strain

Working on a computer for twenty hours per week or more is common. Over time, the need to focus on a screen that is held too close can be very physically demanding on the eyes. Compound that with ever-smaller screens, dimly-lit locales, and glare from various light sources while using a mobile device, and employee/students could experience vision problems known as digital eye strain or computer vision syndrome. Symptoms include eyestrain, headaches, blurred vision, dry eyes, and neck and shoulder pain. Employees and students should have their eyes regularly examined, especially if they are experiencing any of these symptoms, are having difficulties reading, or have a family history of eye or vision problems.

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