

Safe laptop use for students



Laptops are a useful educational tool if used for appropriate periods and attention is given to their proper use. This factsheet outlines some key considerations in the safe use of laptops.

Fact Sheet

Recommended practices for using laptops

To reduce the risk of injury, laptops must be used correctly. Get into good habits before the aching starts as neck, shoulder and back problems build up over time. Some simple solutions include:

Chair

- Adjust the height of your chair to use the keyboard and mouse. After making this height adjustment if your feet cannot be placed flat on the floor, use a footrest. This encourages good posture, enables proper sitting height, avoids pressure placed on the back of the thigh and promotes circulation.
- Adopt a good sitting posture with lower back support.

Mouse

- Instead of using the small constricted touchpad or trackball, you may choose to use an external mouse (if available).
- Place the mouse on the side of the hand that is most comfortable. This places the arms in a neutral and relaxed position and prevents overreaching and twisting of the shoulder, arm and wrist.

Keyboard

- Do not pound the keys. With laptops, the touch is often lighter and the keyboard bed is shallow.
- Position the keyboard so that your forearms are parallel to your thighs when your feet are flat on the floor. This helps maintain blood flow in the hands and arms and decreases muscle strain and tension.
- You may choose to use an external keyboard where possible (if available).

Monitor

- Centre the monitor in front of you at a comfortable viewing distance from the screen. This places the body in a neutral position.
- Position the laptop to minimise reflective glare from overhead, windows or surrounding light sources.
- Adjust the screen so that the top is at eye level. This will reduce the need to bend your head forward and encourage the use of the eyes, instead of the neck, to adjust the line of vision.
- Clean the screen regularly; dust on the screen can make it difficult to read and increase eye strain.

Work area

- Never place a laptop on your lap. It is hot, uncomfortable and potentially dangerous to your health.
- Ensure adequate space is available and other regularly used equipment is within reach.
- You may choose to use a document holder (if available). Place it in front or next to the monitor. This prevents neck and eye strain.
- Create a surface that allows for the following body positioning while typing and using a mouse:
 - Shoulders relaxed, not elevated or “shrugged”
 - Upper arms hanging by sides
 - Right angle at the elbow
 - Forearms, wrists and hands in alignment—no bent wrists
 - Fingers resting lightly on keys.
- Change position occasionally; sitting in one position for an extended period of time can interfere with circulation.

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Take breaks

- Incorporate breaks every 20–30 minutes to rest eyes, stretch hands, muscles and joints; and to break up repetition and static postures.

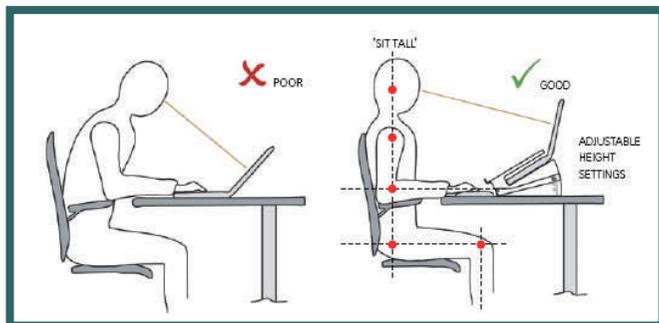
Transporting the laptop

- When carrying a laptop:
 - Select a laptop bag designed to hold only the laptop and associated cords. Larger bags have a tendency to fill up with other items, making for a heavier load.
 - Use a bag with a padded shoulder strap and switch the laptop bag from shoulder to shoulder to relieve the weight.
 - Newer laptops are small enough to fit in backpacks so can be carried on the back and both shoulders, distributing the weight.
 - Use a laptop bag with wheels or a wheeled luggage cart.
- When placing the laptop in a vehicle (or putting it down anywhere), set the weight down close to the body. Avoid reaching across a car seat or deep into the trunk while holding the weight of the laptop.
- Eliminate the need to carry a laptop by using portable media storage (memory stick, flash cards).

Spinal health

To ensure you are able to take part in the things you enjoy, it is important to take care of your back. Tips to help keep your back healthy:

- A backpack carried over both shoulders is the best choice for carrying a load to ensure the weight is evenly distributed. It is recommended that you have a pack with a waist strap — securing a waist strap will help to keep the load in place.
- Pack your backpack so that the heavier objects are placed nearer to your back, with the lighter objects towards the outside.
- Make sure your backpack fits properly. When you sit down with your pack on, it should not extend higher than your shoulders.
- When lifting your backpack, face it, bend at the knees and lift the pack with both hands while straightening your legs. Place the straps over your shoulders one at a time.
- Only carry items that are necessary. If you have a locker, use this to help lighten the load you have to carry during the day.
- When carrying a heavy load over a long distance, take regular breaks to avoid fatigue. Fatigue increases the risk of injury.
- If you sit for long periods of time, ensure that your bottom touches the back of the seat. Take regular breaks when you've been sitting for a long time, briefly move around and/or stretch every hour or so.
- Try to do as much physical activity as possible. When you participate in vigorous activities such as swimming, jogging, etc, ensure that you warm up and stretch before and after.
- If you participate in contact sports, it is important that your neck and spinal muscles are in good condition to help prevent injuries. Regular fitness and skill training are essential in reducing the incidence of injury.



Further information

Spinal health and young people <http://www.chw.edu.au/parents/kidshealth/spinal/>