

How Much Time Do You Spend on the Computer?

As a rule, OEHS suggests the following:

1. **Heavy** computer tasking requires a user to take **10-minute task breaks every hour.**
2. **Light to moderate** computer tasking requires **15-minute task breaks every two hours.**
3. What is a “**Task Break**”?
 - a. **Filing** – Walking to the file cabinet, and filing
 - b. **Copying** – Walking to the copier and copying
 - c. **Mail Run** - Walking to pick up and deliver mail
 - d. **Stretching** – Stretches at the copier, the file cabinet, or before picking up the mail
4. What is a “**Personal Break**”?*
 - a. **Lunch!** -- 30 to 60 minutes of unpaid time to use as you wish.
 - b. OEHS encourages you to take full advantage of the personal break as a rest time away from your workstation. The object is to give your whole body—not just your eyes—time away from the confinement of your computers.
5. **Planning/Involvement:** Discuss task breaks with your supervisor; come up with departmental schedules or a list of approved task breaks. **Work together!**

* **Note:** [See Tulane University Staff Handbook at tulane.edu/~wfmo/index.html](http://tulane.edu/~wfmo/index.html) for complete information on personal breaks.

For more information about task breaks , computer usage, or general ergonomics please visit the OEHS web site at tulane.edu/oehs

Prolonged Periods of Activity



Potential Hazard

- Computer work, whether it's for a job or for fun, may appear to be a low effort activity when viewed from a total body perspective, but maintaining postures or performing highly repetitive tasks for extended periods can lead to problems in localized areas of the body. For example, using a mouse for a few minutes should not be a problem for most users, but performing this task for several uninterrupted hours can expose the small muscles and tendons of the hand to hundreds or even thousands of activations ([repetitions](#)). There may not be adequate time between activations for rest and recuperation, which can lead to localized fatigue, wear and tear, and injury. Likewise, maintaining static postures, such as viewing the monitor, for a prolonged period of time without taking a break can fatigue the muscles of the neck and shoulder that support the head.

Possible Solutions

- Provide variation in tasks and workstations so there is time to recover from the effects of activity. There are several ways to provide recovery time for overused muscles.
 - Utilize an adjustable workstation so users can easily change their [working postures](#). The use of easily adjustable furniture, for example, allows you to frequently change seated postures, which allows different muscle groups to provide support while others rest.
 - Ensure that there is enough [work space](#) so you can use each hand alternately to perform mouse tasks. This allows the tendons and muscles of the free hand to rest.
 - Substitute keystrokes for mousing tasks, such as Ctrl+S to save, Ctrl+P to print. Especially if your job is highly mouse intensive
- High repetition tasks or jobs that require long periods of static posture may require several, short rest breaks (**micro breaks or rest pauses**). During these breaks users should be encouraged to stand, stretch, and move around. This provides rest and allows the muscles enough time to recover.
- Alternate tasks whenever possible, mixing non-computer-related tasks into the workday. This encourages body movement and the use of different muscle groups.



Figure 1.
Stretching during micro breaks

Repetition

Many computer workstation tasks are highly repetitive. You may perform the same motions repeatedly at a fast pace and with little variation. When motions are isolated and repeated frequently for prolonged periods, there may be inadequate time for your muscles and tendons to recover. Combining repetitive tasks with factors such as awkward postures and force may increase the risk of injury.

- Computers require little task variation. Old typing activities, such as adding paper or mechanically advancing pages, have been reduced or eliminated. Users can stay in their chairs and type or perform mouse work for an almost unlimited amount of time. Under these conditions, a proficient typist can easily perform more than 18,000 keystrokes per hour. These repetitive motions can lead to tendon and tendon sheath injuries, especially if the wrist is bent during the activity.
- Similar repetitions occur when using a pointing device such as a mouse. Here, the hazard may be greater because the motions are often concentrated in only a few fingers of one hand.
- A computer operator may remain in essentially the same posture for an entire shift. This forces a few isolated muscles to repeatedly activate to accomplish a task such as holding the head up or focusing on a computer screen.
- A poorly designed workstation may cause you to repeatedly reach to use a mouse or answer the phone. This can fatigue the muscles of the shoulder and irritate the tendons.

You can reduce repetition by properly arranging the workstation and its components. For example, a mouse that is placed close to the keyboard should minimize repetitive reaching. However, even the best designed workstation cannot eliminate all highly repetitive motions, especially for data input. For this reason, it is extremely important to maintain good posture by providing adequate adjustability at the workstation. You should perform all hand tasks with the wrist in a straight, neutral posture to allow the tendons to slide easily without interference.

The following work process suggestions may also help reduce repetition.

- Task Rotation or Job Enlargement - If you must perform a variety of tasks, when possible, intersperse them throughout the work day. Minimize long blocks of uninterrupted computer time by doing other non-computer tasks such as photocopying, phone work, cleanup, etc.
- Micro Breaks or Rest Pauses - Build short micro pauses into computer use sessions. Frequent short breaks are desirable. Every hour, take a five-minute break from computer tasks. Look away, stretch, get up, or walk. These brief pauses provide time for muscles and tendons to recover.