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Typing with Clawed Hands

September 25, 2007 | Posted by alanf

With any computer input device, it's how you use it that is important.

The prevalence is for keyboard users to use 'clawed' hands when using a keyboard to enter text. By this I mean when a user readies their hand position over the keyboard before they type, or whilst in thought between text entries, the hands can be seen to be extended into the air from the wrist in a 'claw' like shape (as pictured below). Often the wrists are leaning on a wrist rest, or worse still, leaning on just the hard desk surface .



Even worse, some users can actually continue typing with their hands in this claw like manner, with the fingers being held high over the keys like an eagle's talons over it's prey.

The risks involved in this practice can be significant when done over a continuous period of time. The forearm extensor muscles are in continuous tension, as well as the tendons over the back of the hands and fingers. If held tense like this for long periods, the forearm muscles can fatigue very easily, ie they are being used in a way that they were not designed to be used for over protracted periods.

Continuous use of this arm/hand pose over a keyboard or other input device can, if left unchecked, eventually progress to RSI like symptoms down the arms and into the hands and fingers.

This may be explained by the forearm muscles being tighter than they should be, which in turn creates tension in the tendons that control the hands and fingers, leading to pain in these tendons as well as the muscles that control them. In worst cases (like my own) the forearm muscles seem to have a very small usage threshold before chronic fatigue sets in and pain occurs. This is attributable on my part to many years of bad keyboard practice, and using the 'claw'. At this stage, I'm unsure whether these muscles or tendons will ever fully recover.

Suggestions for keyboard users –

1. Do not use the 'claw shape' wrist when typing on any keyboard. Try leaving your wrists in neutral position with no wrist or forearm tension.
2. Try using the weight of your hands and fingers to hit the keys (not raising your individual fingers to do so.) This can be achieved by lifting your forearms/hands from the upper arms and shoulders as opposed to clawing the individual fingers back, which fatigues muscles and creates tension in tendons, ultimately leading to RSI like symptoms.
3. Examine you forearm muscles for signs of pain. Press your thumb into the forearm muscle tissue about 3 finger widths down from the elbow bone, and see if these muscles are sore when pressed. If they are, then you may be putting yourself at risk of RSI, and should change your ergonomic practices to reduce the forearm muscle tension.



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4. You may need a keyboard height adjustment to reduce the forearm tension. This may involve installing a drop down keyboard tray for optimal position.
5. Some relief for sufferers can be gained by massage of the upper forearm muscles. This can be done by the sufferer by either using a thumb to rub deeply into the forearm muscles tissue, or by use of an electric hand held massager. Alternatively a sufferer can obtain professional massage from a physiotherapist. The pained forearm muscles in can respond well to massage, but relief may be temporary since the pain is merely the symptom and not the root cause, which is bad posture.


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hector says:

August 20, 2009 at 10:32 am

excellent post and explanations



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