

Potential risks of computer games and text messaging

Computer games

The number of recorded cases is still relatively low but many parents and health professionals are concerned about the potential for RSI affecting schoolchildren.

The playing of computer games needs careful attention, particularly if combined with keyboarding and text-messaging. Children may be at risk of straining their hands and wrists. During the RSIA Annual Conference 2001 Dr Diana Macgregor of the Royal Aberdeen Children's Hospital has highlighted the case of an 11-year-old boy who developed tendinitis following long periods on his Nintendo GameBoy, a condition that has come to be known as 'Nintendonitis'. Full transcripts of the conference are available for £5 from the RSIA at the number below.

Computer games are powerfully addictive and children's time on them needs to be carefully managed. However, banning computer use entirely is unreasonable and inappropriate. Measures such as rest and increased variety of leisure pursuits will allow tendons and muscle to recover. Dr Macgregor also recommends the use of preventative hand-care exercises.

It should also be pointed out that children play games because they want to - not because of any contract, job-target, financial imperative or other work pressure. Without these complex social factors they are at less risk of developing the chronic, prolonged hand diseases of adulthood. The long-term effects of poor posture on developing bodies are just as big a concern.

Text messaging

The number of recorded cases is still relatively low but mobile phone users are at risk of developing various RSI-type conditions.

The sending of text messages needs careful attention, particularly if combined with prolonged computer use at school or work. With over 42 million text messages being sent every day now, mobile phone users may be at risk of injuring their hands as well as developing poor postural habits.

Texting can be quite addictive. In addition to voice-activated dialling, there are ways to limit the physical strain on your fingers. Although it takes patience to begin with, it is worth learning how to use your handset's special features such as message templates and predictive text.

The British Chiropractors Association recommends the use of preventative neck stretches and hand-care exercises. Information on these 'textercises' made available by one of the phone companies and can be downloaded from:

http://www.virginmobile.com/mobile/documents/services/text_message_injury.pdf

Aching fingers will normally respond well to an initial period of rest which allows the tendons and muscles to recover. If symptoms persist you should see a medical specialist and refer to other relevant RSIA factsheets for information on treatment and recovery.