

Beware...Cell Phone Elbow on the Rise!

***By Johnine Mowatt, Principal Consultant/Ergonomics Engineer
ThinkERGO, LLC***

Computer workstations may not be the only areas at work that cause everlasting discomfort and pain. Sometimes these issues can be credited to other digital age conveniences we use daily and take for granted, such as the cell phone. According to the Hand and Upper Extremity Center at the Cleveland Clinic, ***cell phone elbow*** is on the rise. A recently published article in the Cleveland Clinic Journal of Medicine attributes this ailment to prolonged cell phone use. Medically known as cubital tunnel syndrome, it is caused by bending the elbow at an angle greater than 90 degrees over an extended period of time. Symptoms include aching, burning, numbness and/or tingling in the forearm, hand and/or fingers (index or pinky fingers) due to the compression of the ulnar nerve (one of the main nerves in the hand.)

In the '*ergonomics world*', a combination of risk factors such as high repetition (i.e. excessive phone use) and awkward posture (i.e. greater than a 90 degree elbow angle) increases the risk of developing ergonomic-related injuries (i.e. cell phone elbow). These injuries not only cause pain and discomfort, it also slows our productivity by limiting what we can do when we need to get it done.

So, how do you avoid falling victim to another digital-age ailment? The following tips can minimize your exposure to the risk factors.

1. Switch it up! Change hands frequently when using your cell phone or use a hands free device.
2. Avoid leaning on your elbow at all times especially while driving or working on your computer.
3. Create an '*ergonomic friendly*' workstation that allows the elbow to remain at an angle of 90 degrees or less at all times.

Avoiding treatment can lead to debilitating results including loss of muscle strength and difficulty writing or typing. Chronic cases can cause the index and/or pinky finger to claw. If after implementing these tips you continue to experience the symptoms of cell phone elbow, see your doctor for medical assistance.