

DISPLAY SCREEN EQUIPMENT - The Facts & The Fiction -

Current Health & Safety Law places certain responsibilities on employers to provide safe working environments, safe systems of work and equipment, and also places responsibility on employees and self-employed individuals to work safely and follow the health and safety recommendations provided. Work with display screen equipment has attracted a great deal of attention and its' own health and safety legislation (The Health & Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulation 1992).

It is important that as an employee your workplace and workstation is assessed appropriately by your employer. It is important that you are provided with the correct information and training and that if appropriate your employer arranges certain health checks on a regular basis. Your employer is also responsible to ensure that you the employee follow the rules and recommendations.

Display screen equipment includes visual display units, personal computers, laptop computers and microfiche systems.

Not everyone who works with display screen equipment is at risk. Many people have a computer on their desk and use it only occasionally. Individuals who use their computer daily or for most of the day are at higher risk of developing health effects, and they are considered to be "regular users".

Health Effects

The regular use of display screen equipment has been associated with the following:-

- Visual discomfort (eye fatigue and headaches);
- Upper limb pain - also known as musculoskeletal disorders such as Carpal Tunnel Syndrome and Tenosynovitis;
- Painful muscles and joints – this includes neck pain, shoulder pain, upper arm pain, mid and lower back pain;
- Stress – both psychological and physical.

It is important to ensure that your working environment is appropriate and has been set up correctly. Health issues occur in the following situations:-

- Working repeatedly with a poor posture;
- Working for too long without a break or changing your position or activity;
- Working in a poor environment – poor lighting, poor humidity, poor temperature control;
- Being overworked or having your workload inappropriately managed.

There are many concerns regarding display screen equipment and computers that have been proven not to be true. There is no evidence to suggest that computers or display screens give off harmful radiation or cause problems with pregnancy. There is no evidence to suggest that people suffering with Epilepsy are any more at risk when working with display screen equipment. Display screen equipment does not damage eyesight or make vision deteriorate.

Preventing Health Problems

Ensure that the posture you adopt is correct:-

- ♦ Change your position regularly;
- ♦ Learn to adjust your chair and your computer screen properly;
- ♦ Be aware of what are good working practices and poor working practices;
- ♦ Be aware of the requirements regarding lighting and correct positioning of your arms and head when viewing a display screen;
- ♦ Take regular exercise during the working day to prevent fatigue, headaches, eyestrain, muscle pain and joint stiffness. These could include:-
 1. Warm up before starting work.
 2. Regularly look away from the screen at objects in the far distance or other individuals.
 3. When facing straight ahead watching your display screen turn your head slowly from one side to the other.
 4. Shrug your shoulders regularly to release any tension.
 5. Stretch your arms out straight and over your head on a regular basis.
 6. Move your wrists up and down and rotate your wrists.
 7. Spread your fingers as wide as you can and then make a fist – do this on a regular basis to avoid stiffening of the joints.

Conclusion

- Take care of your own health and safety and that of others;
- Be aware of how your workstation should be arranged;
- Be aware of how to arrange and adjust the different pieces of equipment that make up your workstation;
- Take care of your health;
- Attend any health examinations that are provided for you;
- Use spectacles if required;
- Exercise regularly.