

A Healthy Relationship with Your Mouse

By Nancy M. Lowe, MPT, CHT, CAE

Though your computer mouse may look small and innocent, your interactions with it can be painful and fraught with peril. I may be "mousing around" a bit, but a good relationship with your mouse is very important. Mouse-related pain seems to be a more common problem than pain caused by use of the keyboard. Here are five ways to ensure a healthy relationship with your mouse. The path is simple and, like many relationships, not always easy. But if you decide to put forth the effort you can be well-rewarded.

Five keys to a healthy relationship with your mouse:

- 1. Intimacy: Keep the mouse close to you without crowding.** The more distant the mouse, the more awkward your wrist and shoulder positions. These awkward postures increase your risk of discomfort and injury. If the mouse is not immediately next to your keyboard you may need to rearrange things or consider a different work surface. If reaching beyond the numeric keypad is a problem, consider a short keyboard or using the mouse on the shorter left side of the keyboard.
- 2. Neutrality: Use a 'neutral' wrist position.** People tend to plant the wrist or forearm on the desk or a wrist rest. They must then use repetitive wrist movements or claw-like hand motions to move the mouse. This can lead to fatigue and pain in the wrist, hand and forearm. Keep the wrist neutral, or in a straight line.
- 3. Support: Gently rest your hand on the mouse, moving your arm as a unit.** Start with your palm supported lightly on the mouse, your shoulder relaxed and your elbow at your side. You must have the mouse at a very comfortable proximity and height to accomplish this. Try moving the mouse using small motions of the whole arm. This can help you maintain a neutral wrist posture and decrease strain on the hand and forearm. You may also do without a wrist rest, which tends to create problems of its own (read the article "To Rest or Not to Rest," to get more information on wrist rests).
- 4. Consideration: Click lightly and not too often.** Pounding or pressing hard to click places undue forces on the tiny muscles of the fingers and hand. Press only as hard as necessary. Decrease the number and duration of mouse clicks by using keyboard shortcuts, keystrokes that take the place of mouse clicks. Take advantage of the now-common programmable mice that can allow you to scroll more easily, perform double-click operations with a single click, easily access commonly used applications or websites, and more.



Lightly rest your palm on the mouse, using a neutral (straight) wrist position to prevent fatigue and pain.

5. Time Apart: Remove your hand from the mouse when you aren't actively mousing.

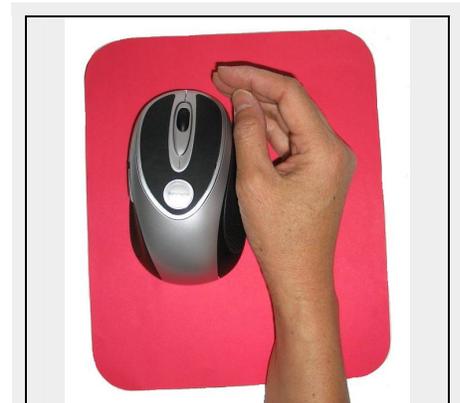
A hand that is poised and waiting to click is a hand under tension. This tension can extend up your arm to your shoulder, neck and back. Static tension decreases blood flow and increases risk of muscle fatigue, discomfort, and pain. Remove your hand from the mouse and rest it in a non-mousing position such as the thumb-side-up or palm-up position, or relax your hand in your lap.

6. Moving on: Change mice if yours is not a good fit.

If the mouse is not properly sized for you to rest your palm on it and click with the pads of slightly bent fingers, consider a mouse of a different size or contour. However, if your problems lie in your workstation setup, your alignment, or ineffective habits, you could move on only to experience the same problems with the next mouse.

7. Getting help: See a professional. If you can't resolve your mousing difficulties on your own, you may need the help of a certified ergonomist with experience in office settings. You may benefit further from choosing an ergonomist who is also a licensed physical or occupational therapist or a certified hand therapist, particularly if you already have pain or an injury.

As with any meaningful relationship, your interactions with your mouse can affect your health and comfort as well as your ability to accomplish your goals. It may take practice, it may take focused effort, but the benefits of safe mousing will be well worth it.



Remove your hand from the mouse and rest in the thumb-up or palm-up position when not actively mousing.

Nancy M. Lowe is a Certified Ergonomist, Registered Physical Therapist and Certified Hand Therapist with over 20 years of experience treating and preventing injuries. For more ergonomics information visit <http://www.pacificcoastergo.com>

Copyright 2009 Nancy Lowe / Pacific Coast Ergonomics