



# An Educated Minute

from the Human Resources Department

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## RSI's

### What are Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSI's)?

An injury to muscles, tendons, nerves, and other soft tissues as a result of repeated stress. Injury may be caused by any combination of repetitive, unaccustomed, or prolonged movements, forcefulness, or an awkward position (often due to bad ergonomics). The symptoms are pain, tingling, weakness, numbness, swelling, cracking, stiffness, or reduced coordination.



### Types of RSI injuries include:

**Carpal tunnel syndrome** is the most widely recognized repetitive strain injury. If you have this you'll likely feel pain or numbness in the wrist, thumb and first three fingers and a loss of strength or dexterity in the hand. That's because of swelling of membrane linings and the surrounding tendons in the base of the palm, which compresses the nerve that supplies most of the feeling to the hand.

**Bursitis** - You'll experience joint pain and stiffness and limited movement of the shoulder or elbow if you have bursitis. This is because of inflammation of the bursa against the tendons that attach the muscles to the shoulder or elbow.

**Epicondylitis** is more commonly known as tennis elbow and, because of computers, 'mousers' elbow. Repeated bending of the wrist and fingers cause tiny ruptures of the muscle and tendon on the inside of the elbow. This condition includes inflammation or tear of the tendons that attach the forearm muscles to the elbow. This condition can be very painful and should be treated as soon as possible.

**Tendonitis** causes inflammation of the tendon, often in the wrist, forearms, elbow or shoulder.

**Diffuse RSI** - People suffering from diffuse RSI have multiple areas of diffuse pain in the muscles and other soft tissues. This condition is caused by nerve compression in areas where nerves or arteries are susceptible to pinching from joint movements. This can be aggravated if repetitive movements are combined with an awkward position or excessive force.

The Canadian Physiotherapy Association (CPA) recommends following these simple tips to help prevent RSI's from happening:

- Work smarter not harder – adapt work station or processes to ensure correct posture during activity and vary tasks throughout the day
- Warm up before you start work and do simple stretches throughout the day
- Decrease excessive force – use aides such as a dolly to transport items or automated office equipment for large jobs
- Take regular breaks, change your position frequently, if possible alternate between tasks that require sitting and standing
- Be body aware; report problems early so that prevention interventions such as adapting work station or processes can avert the onset of RSI
- Prepare your body for work with a fitness program. Whether you have an active job or sit at a desk all day, regular activities that do not predominantly use the same muscles you overuse at work promotes health and prevents injuries.



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