

5 Tips for Using a Laptop Computer

1. Un-ergonomic Laptops - the design of laptops violates a basic ergonomic requirement for a computer, namely that the keyboard and screen are separated. Laptop devices integrate the screen and keyboard into a single unit, and this has resulted in widespread complaints of musculoskeletal discomfort. The explanation is simple - with a fixed design, if the keyboard is in an optimal position for the user, the screen isn't and if the screen is optimal the keyboard isn't.

2. Laptop User Type - how do you use your laptop? Are you an **occasional user** who works on your laptop for short periods of time or are you a **full-time user** with the laptop as your main computer? Occasional users will have less risk of problems than full-time users. All users should pay some attention to how they use their laptop, but full-time users may have more problems.

3. Laptop Posture - as indicated above, laptops violate basic ergonomic design requirements, so using a laptop is a tradeoff between poor neck/head posture and poor hand/wrist posture.

- **Occasional Users** - because the neck/head position is determined by the actions of large muscles, you are better off sacrificing neck posture rather than wrist posture. For occasional use:
 - find a chair that is comfortable and that you can sit back in
 - positioning your laptop in your lap for the most neutral wrist posture that you can achieve
 - angling the laptop screen so that you can see this with the least amount of neck deviation
- **Full-time Users** - if you use your laptop at work as your main computer you should:
 - position this on your desk/work surface in front of you so that you can see the screen without bending your neck. This may require that you elevate the laptop off the desk surface using a stable support surface, such as a computer monitor pedestal.
 - Use a separate keyboard and mouse. You should be able to connect a keyboard and mouse directly to the back of the laptop or to a docking station
 - use the keyboard to ensure a wrist neutral posture
 - use the mouse on an adjustable position mouse platform

4. Laptop dimensions - many laptops offer large screens (15" plus) and can work as desktop replacements (giving the viewing area of a 17" monitor). However, think about where you will most use your laptop to help you choose the best size. The larger the screen the more difficult it will be to use this in mobile locations (e.g. airplane, car, train). There are a number of smaller notebook and ultraportable laptops on the market. Consider issues of screen size and screen resolution. The smaller the laptop, the smaller the keyboard, so make sure that you can comfortably type on a keyboard that may be only 75% the size of a regular keyboard.

5. Laptop weight - if you are a mobile professional who will be frequently transporting your laptop think about the weight of the system. By the word 'system' I mean the weight of the laptop plus the required accessories (e.g. power supply, spare battery, external disk drive, zip drive, CD_RW, DVD, Blu Ray etc.). Many lightweight portables can become as heavy as regular laptops when you add the weight of all of the components together. If your laptop + components weigh 10lbs or more then you should certainly consider using a carry-on bag that you can pull along.