

EFFICIENT REST DAYS

By Dr. Lisa Erikson, DC



IMPROVE MUSCLE RECOVERY TIMES BY CREATING AN ERGONOMIC WORK SPACE

As much as our social media streams may suggest otherwise, most climbers are real people with real jobs, spending a fair share of time deskbound. But fear not, weekend warriors, all that time in front of a computer screen doesn't have to go to waste: With the proper approach, working at a desk can become a highly effective form of recovery. No joke. Most of our physical gains occur during the rest phase. Muscular micro-tears, swelling, scrapes, and bruises heal quickly with the right nutrients, rest, and support. We are getting work done and paying the bills, and all the while our bodies are restructuring piece by piece. Here are a few tips on how to turn your desk into a rest oasis; they're small changes, but add it up over several years and you'll see a huge difference in the health of your body.

DESK EDGES

Repairing tight forearm muscles requires adequate blood flow that brings oxygen and the ability to rebuild small tears created during intense work like climbing. Unfortunately both your desk and your laptop can inhibit that, and they can create more stress on overworked arms. Laying your wrist flexors on any angled surface can produce friction, resulting in more knots and injury. Check your laptop; check your desk.

Fix it: Luckily, there's a simple modification: inexpensive pipe foam from the hardware store. Just cut it to fit and tape it over the edge. More expensive options are edge protectors by Human Solution (\$45, thehumansolution.com) or the Imak Laptop Cushion (\$16, amazon.com). A minimalist fix is to simply file or sand sharp edges down (if you own the laptop or desk, of course!), but your best rest will come when your forearm is in contact with a padded surface.



MOUSE

As you can easily push that mouse a few miles in a year, you need an intervention. The type of mouse you have is less important than how you use it. Positioning is everything. Don't let the mouse sit as far from you as it can; pull it in closer by your side and make friends with it. Same goes for your keyboard. Don't make your body work harder than it has to.

Fix it: An easy solution for a huge issue, pulling your elbows toward your midline will rest the shoulder girdle stabilizers, neck, and rotator cuff in that neutral position. It can eliminate those aches and pains in the neck and upper back, which are common in desk workers, and it will protect your shoulders, which are prone to injury for climbers.

Let's talk about friction. Repetitively rubbing the same spot on your hand or wrist on the surface of your mouse or desk could limit the ability of your body's soft tissue to heal. Pain in any specific location that contacts the mouse is a sign that you might be putting too much pressure on that region. This aggravates pre-existing injuries and creates new ones.

Fix it: Easy modifications include stick-on silicone gel padding from the shoe aisle or self-care section of your local drug store, or you can swap to a different mouse altogether (see below). If your wrist is bothering you, try a pad that has a special gel-filled section for your wrist. Just as none of us climb the same, none of us mouse the same. Streamlining your uses will decrease your abuses.

Repetitively firing that clicker fatigues your already-tight flexor muscles and rubs on your pulley tendons with every click. An ergonomic mouse is excellent for keeping your arm and hand in a healthy position, which will allow your climbing overuse injuries to heal quickly and efficiently. As the most commonly injured fingers in climbing are the middle and ring fingers, protecting them is a no-brainer.

Fix it: If you suffer from wrist, forearm, or finger fatigue, consider a mouse that puts your hand in the thumb-up position. Thumb mouses are great because they allow your arm to rest in a neutral position (fig. 2) on the outer edge of your forearm, instead of using muscle power to force it flat (fig. 1). If you stick with a standard mouse, try swapping your mouse hand every few days to avoid repetitive injuries. It will take a while to get your non-dominant hand used to being in control, but you'll fine-tune your motor skills and hand-eye coordination in the process.

JUST ASK

Many offices offer an ergonomic assessment to help you avoid overuse injuries at the workplace. Ask your office manager to look into purchasing ergonomic tools so you can be comfortable and stay injury-free while working at your desk. The cost to the company can come back ten-fold in productivity, worker satisfaction, and a better overall atmosphere in the office. A happy worker is a hard worker.

STANDING

The shift from sitting to standing is the latest trend in workplace ergonomics. There are now standing desks and even treadmill desks. Standing up means your body is moving constantly, shifting from side to side, and these many small motions lubricate the joints and allow your muscles to receive increased nutrition, oxygen, and blood flow. Sitting is actually excellent for resting your body, but it's crucial to get up every 30 minutes to talk a walk, stretch, and move your whole body.

Fix it: To affordably modify your current desk into a standing desk, you don't need to spend all of your cash. With a little bit of creative ingenuity and some books, boxes, and/or stands, you can have the perfect standing desk. Try filing cabinets under your existing desk or using a wall shelving unit with various heights. The perfect height will have the desk's surface just below your elbow, so when the forearm is resting on the desk, your elbow is at about 90°. (See above-right for the correct position of the monitor.) Keep in mind that if you just have a laptop, you will definitely need a separate keyboard or monitor for a standing desk to be helpful.

BEN FULLERTON (2)

BEN FULLERTON (4)



MONITOR

Close is good. Too far away and your eyes will fatigue and your neck will strain. Too high or too low and your neck and eyes will be locked into an awkward position that forces them to work harder than they should. The goal is to cut down on eye fatigue and relax the neck as much as possible. Imagine looking down all day at work and then up all night while belaying and climbing; it is hard for the body to cope with such extreme opposites. Same goes for looking up all day and then continuing at night; being locked in this position will give you belayer's neck twice as fast.

Fix it: The monitor should sit 20 to 30 inches from your face. The point on the screen that you look at the most should sit about 10 degrees below where your gaze falls when looking straight ahead. When the monitor is positioned correctly, angle the screen slightly by tilting the top back 10-20°.

Unfortunately, laptops pretty much set users up for injury. They're not meant to be ergonomic, just lightweight and compact. Most faces and necks become positioned too low, bent over and peering down at the screen. If you raise the laptop to protect these regions, your hands are up in the air, wrecking your shoulders.

Fix it: When working at a desk, put your laptop on a stand and get an external keyboard. Worth its weight in gold, it unloads your neck and keeps you in an ergonomic position. If you are using a monitor at work and have the same problem, put it on a wall-mounted arm, or put phonebooks under it so you can have it as close to eye height as possible.



KEYBOARD

Traditional straight keyboards force us to engage muscles to keep palms flat. This prevents full rest, fatigues the muscles, and puts them in an unnatural and injury-causing position. The supinator muscle goes into overdrive in this orientation, and that inner elbow attachment point is a common painful spot for climbers.

Fix it: A curved keyboard is the answer. With the same concept as the thumb-up mouse, it allows hands and forearms to naturally rotate with palms facing inward toward each other. Finding a keyboard that fits this arc allows us to rest, and this increased rest allows us to conquer side-pulls, crimps, and underclings better as our elbow stabilizers are fresh and spry.

CHAIR

Sitting up straight at work is hard enough, even after just a few hours, and it can be even harder for climbers who already have problems with over-developed back muscles that lead to a hunchback posture. Whenever you slump over, you're putting your spine in an unhealthy position, which can lead to aches and pains beyond normal muscle soreness from climbing. While this might seem counter-intuitive, this slouching position also activates and engages the muscles surrounding your spine, preventing quality rest.

Fix it: An inflatable pillow is a fantastic trick to help you sit in the upright position in almost any chair. It places the weight of your body over your bony vertebrae, which allows the body to balance intuitively. To use the pillow correctly, make sure your chair is upright and in a locked position, at a height that keeps your elbows resting at 90°. Feet should be flat on the floor. Place the pillow against your lower back so it straightens your spine and puts your head directly between your shoulders. The closest we can come to neutral posture while sitting, even with props, the happier our body will be.

Stretches to Undo Your Day



Being limber and loose allows your muscles their best chance of healing, and stretching can decrease your risk of injury by leaps and bounds. Here are a few stretches to incorporate into your day to further aid in recovery:

NECK PNF STRETCHES

PNF (proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation) stretching is 40 percent more effective than static stretching. Sitting on your left hand, use your right hand to pull your head to the side. Stretch your neck gently, focusing on what feels the tightest or the sorest. Then slowly and carefully resist the pressure and push your head against your hand. Relax and begin the stretch again. Repeat four times per side focusing on what needs it. Moving the chin to either side will bring the stretch to a new region that also might need attention.



DOORWAY FAN LUNGE STRETCH

Stand in the doorway with arms up and hands against the frame to stretch your chest muscles, and then step into a lunge position, stretching the opposite hip and shoulder at the same time. Lower into and out of the lunge, starting with your hands and elbows as high as they go while maintaining a lunge. Repeat the lunge and lower the elbows and hands by an inch each time. Push on the doorway to help you stand up (another PNF-type stretch) and to come back down into the stretch and lunge. Do it on both sides, with a five-second stretch and a two-second push against the doorway when transitioning. Do six to 10 different hand positions on the doorway. Go through again and spend 15 to 30 seconds stretching out the tightest areas.

SUPINE HIP AND CHEST OPENER

A great way to stretch your groin and chest at the end of your day. Begin on your back and put a yoga block directly between your shoulder blades. Put the soles of your feet together and allow knees to drift out to the sides. If your neck or knees need assistance, put a pillow underneath. Let your head drift back, arms open wide, feeling a stretch through your chest and inner thighs. Stretch three to five minutes.

