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PUBLICATION:	Community Times
DATE:	February-2016
COUNTRY:	Egypt
CIRCULATION:	6,000
TITLE :	How your modern lifestyle may be a menace to your health
PAGE:	18-19
ARTICLE TYPE:	General Health News
REPORTER:	Basma Mostafa

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HOW YOUR MODERN LIFESTYLE MIGHT BE A MENACE TO YOUR **HEALTH**

While current technology may allow us to live easier lives than our ancestors and mechanize many of our everyday tasks, our lifestyles are not making us any healthier. Community Times speaks to Maha Salim, Doctor of Physical Therapy, to get a better idea of how our modern lifestyle is taking a toll on our bodies. By Basma Mostafa

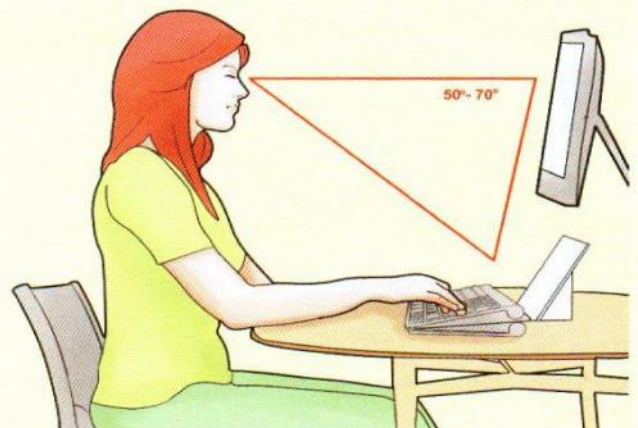
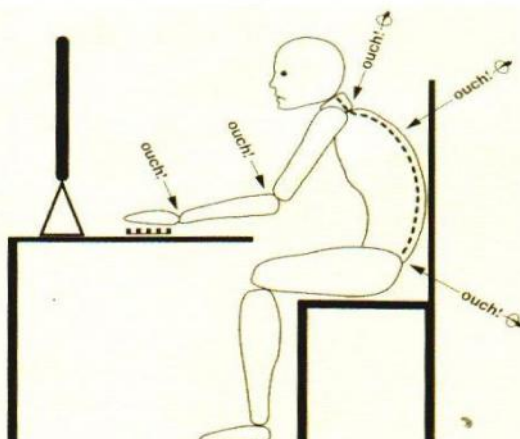
While it may seem that spending two straight hours on a computer is an efficient way to get work done, Salim explains that you may be doing more damage to your body than you think. "It is quite common for people who spend long hours typing or using the mouse to develop pains in the area above their wrists, a condition known as carpal tunnel syndrome," explains Salim. If you repetitively use your hands without paying attention to proper posture, you may be putting pressure on one of the nerves in your wrist, which leads to numbness, tingling, weakness, and other problems in the hand.

Salim adds that the damage of sitting for long hours extends to your back, neck, and eyes as well. "You should not place your computer on a flat surface. Instead, your desk should be slightly tilted towards you. Leaning forward to be able to see your screen properly overstretches all the muscles of the back. Sitting in such a position for prolonged periods of time can make any medical condition you might already have much worse," she says. She explains that the top of the computer screen should be on the same level as your eyes. A screen that is too low will cause you to tilt your head forward, giving you neck pain, while a screen that is too high will cause you to tilt your head back, leading to pain in the neck and shoulders.

Hunching over your computer weakens your back muscles and the scapula muscle, the muscle at the back of your arm, which may eventually lead to kyphosis, an exaggerated rounding of the spine. "Tightness, shortening, and spasms in the muscles of the neck may occur because you spend long hours looking in the same direction without moving your head right or left," says Salim.



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To protect your body, Salim suggests getting up every 30 minutes and walking around the office for at least five minutes. Not only does this improve your circulation, but it also relieves some of the tension on your muscles and eyes. If you feel you are too busy for a short five-minute break, Salim says you are mistaken, because taking short, frequent breaks actually makes you more productive.

Salim explains that the vertebral column has four curves, two of which are convex and two concave. “Bad posture changes concave curves into convex and vice versa.” You also need to sit upright and to choose a desk chair that supports your entire back. If your chair doesn’t support your lower back, add a small pillow or towel to protect the curve at the end of your back from flattening. “Your neck should be in a neutral position. Don’t hunch forward or bend backward,” she adds.



“Another condition that may occur as a result of excessive computer use is tennis elbow, which results in the inflammation of the tendons of the elbow,” she adds.

While it may seem unlikely that something as seemingly innocuous as a smartphone may cause damage, excessive chatting may lead to the inflammation of the tendons below the thumb. “In some severe cases, patients are not even able to move their hands and they hear a clicking sound when they do,” says Salim.



If you are accustomed to pre-bed browsing, Salim suggests it may be time to stop. “If you tend to browse in a completely dark room, the only source of light for your eyes is the screen of your gadget, which massively dilates your pupils and exhausts your eyes,” she explains. She explains that you should either keep the light of your phone display to a minimum or turn the lights on. Furthermore, being exposed to gadget screens messes with your brain’s ability to release melatonin, the hormone that tells your brain that night has fallen, which means it will take you longer to fall asleep.

Salim then explains that one of the unhealthiest trends of modern times is going to bed later at night and sleeping in the next morning. “In the past, people used to wake up at the crack of dawn and go to bed shortly after the sun sets. This is how our bodies were meant to function. Waking up early helps you feel more active and more capable of concentrating,” she says, adding that sleeping early also improves the metabolism. “When you sleep, the pituitary gland organizes how other glands work, including those responsible for your weight. So if your glands don’t get enough rest, you may gain weight and find it difficult to lose weight.”

MODERN NUTRITION

“What fast food does to your body is catastrophic,” says Salim, adding that the preservatives in processed food are very bad for the human body. “Everything that doesn’t come from nature is accountable for the diseases of our age. Take chicken stock, for example; it has more salt than your body needs, and includes two substances that shouldn’t even be eaten.” Too much sugar isn’t good for your body either, but most of the sugar your body gets doesn’t come from obvious things like your coffee, but rather it comes from processed foods.



“Hydrogenated margarine is another disaster. It can give you cancer. Today, many people in their thirties have accumulated fats around their livers; many girls have PCOS, a problem where the hormones are out of balance. This is all because of what we eat and the fact that we don’t work out enough,” Salim explains. Another dangerous habit is eating in front of the television. “You keep eating because you enjoy the show and you end up without a clue about how much food you have consumed.”

The things we have created to make our lives easier may, in fact, be leading to our slow demise. In today’s world, it matters more than ever to lead an active lifestyle, just to counter all the damage our bodies endure. ■