

Healthy Quilting

Everyone is familiar with the visible hazards of quilting such as sewing through your finger or stabbing yourself with scissors. Many of us, however, are not as aware of the hazards that we can't see. These would include, repetitive strain injury, back injuries and eye strain that are caused by many hours of small, repetitive work.

Some of the symptoms to look out for are:

- Tightness, discomfort, stiffness, soreness or burning in the hands, wrists, fingers, forearms, or elbows
- Tingling, coldness, or numbness in the hand
- Clumsiness or loss of strength and coordination in the hands
- Pain that wakes you up at night
- Feeling a need to massage your hands, wrists, and arms
- Chronic back aches and head aches, especially after long periods of quilting

Proper setup, posture and work techniques can help to prevent injury.

1. Keep your hands and arms warm. Cold muscles and tendons are more susceptible to injury.
2. Invest in a proper chair. Choose a chair that follows the contour of your spine. I can speak with experience what damage a hard wooden kitchen chair can do.
3. Position your feet correctly. Your feet should rest flat on the floor. If they don't you may want to consider a footrest.
4. Lumbar support. If your chair does not come with lumbar support, you can use either a purchased lumbar roll or use a rolled-up towel. You may find this uncomfortable at first, but it will improve your posture and reduce the potential of injury. A lumbar support should be placed at the small of your back at the level of the beltline.
5. Arm position. Your arms should extend straight from your elbows at a 90 degree angle with your wrists aligned with your forearms. Your shoulders should be kept low and relaxed. Play with the height of your chair, table and armrests until you find a comfortable position.
6. Take frequent breaks. Take a break at least once every hour. Get out of your chair and walk around for five minutes. Or do some stretches.
7. Don't forget to blink. Every once in awhile, focus on an object far away. Also, make sure that you are using adequate lighting.
8. Listen to your body. If you experience persistent pain, swelling or stiffness, see your doctor immediately.

If you wish further information on quilting injuries, you may want to try Cathy Watts's book, "The Hidden Hazards of Quilting" or consult with a doctor or physical therapist.