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## A dozen ways to save your body and mind in the reading room

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I know it might seem a little unconventional, but in a moment I'm going to ask you to do me a favor. If you can't do it today, then please do it first thing tomorrow. Remember, it's for me. I'm not going to ask you to do this for yourself, because we physicians as a group are notoriously bad about looking out for our own physical and mental health. But we are often pretty darn good about doing favors for colleagues, friends, family and other people.

As I travel across the country, I am speaking with a growing number of radiology colleagues who have repetitive motion injuries to their hands, wrists and other parts of their body. I'm talking about things like compressive neuropathies such as carpal and cubital tunnel syndromes, neck strain, eyestrain (if not full-blown computer vision syndrome), back pain, headaches and other problems that, at their most severe, have resulted in prolonged absences or even reluctant early retirement. This phenomenon is not new, but it has been exacerbated in the past several years by the transition to computer monitors, the use of computer mouses or track balls, and the increasing complexity and volume of exams.

Yet, despite all these problems, we radiologists tend to come into work every day, to the same reading room situation as the day before, without ever questioning the types or placements of our chairs, monitors, lighting, acoustics, input devices, ventilation or other factors that could make a major difference in our short, medium and long-term physical and mental states of well-being.

So, here's the favor: Pick at least two of the following one-dozen recommendations and begin giving them a try today or tomorrow morning. If you do, I'll be really grateful and owe you one!

### 12 ways to improve your working environment

1. Replace those fluorescent tubes and bulbs in your reading room with "warm temperature" (ie, 2700K) LED bulbs. Even the imperceptible flicker of the fluorescents can be a source of stress and eyestrain. Add a dimmer switch to control the luminance and try to match the brightness of the lighting with that of your monitors.
2. Add a desk lamp as a source of indirect lighting if you don't have one already.

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- 3.** Apply the 20/20/20 rule, and look 20 feet away for 20 seconds every 20 minutes to help reduce the constant eyestrain associated with the close proximity of your computer monitor—and make an appointment to have your eyes checked if you haven't done so recently.
  - 4.** Place your chair at a height that allows you to look slightly down at the middle portion of your monitor, perhaps an angle of 10 to 20 degrees.
  - 5.** Consider purchasing a blue light and shine it on the wall behind your monitor to reduce overall stress levels and improve visual acuity under relatively low light levels in the reading room.
  - 6.** Add a source of flowing air at your workstation. You'd never consider buying or renting a car that doesn't allow you to enjoy some soothing and healthy ventilation.
  - 7.** Set the room temperature at a comfortable level: 78°F is best for relaxing, while 70 to 75 is probably best for working, depending on how you are dressed.
  - 8.** For a few hundred dollars, purchase a "sound masking" system for your reading room, which will help reduce outside and inside sources of noisy distraction. At low levels such a system can also actually increase speech recognition accuracy.
  - 9.** Look for sound-dampening baffles, ceiling tiles and carpets, all of which can make a huge difference in reducing noise. Consider music if you like it and it doesn't disturb others. Research shows that music can improve alertness when you're tired and elevate your mood. Unfortunately, it doesn't seem to improve concentration or efficiency.
  - 10.** Learn how to use the controls on the seat you're already using with regard to height and seating angle. Consider getting a better chair and try one out for a week, rather than the two minutes most radiologists take to evaluate a chair to see whether it helps relieve back strain and other problems. The best chairs have adjustable armrests with lumbar support
  - 11.** Try a variety of tables for your monitors. The newer tables have built-in lighting, ventilation, microphones and other tools and can really help reduce strain and improve your efficiency. And don't forget to look into a more ergonomic computer mouse; it can make a huge difference to your hands and wrists over the long term.
  - 12.** Silly as it might sound, consider getting scented candles and having someone dust the room more regularly. The sense of smell is an overlooked but very powerful factor in our comfort, as every shopping mall and hotel knows all too well.
- I believe the return on investment in improved workstation design and ergonomics will be surprisingly fast—a month or less for most of these suggestions. And the value of the reduced physical and mental stress on your body and mind? Priceless!