

How to text message and avoid pain

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This is Ewa Gustafsson, Ph.D., from the University of Gothenburg. Credit: University of Gothenburg

While it is well known that excessive text messaging can result in sore thumbs, less is known about its possible effects on the neck, arms and hands. Young adults with symptoms in these parts of the body use a different technique when texting, according to a study at the Sahlgrenska Academy, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Ergonomist Ewa Gustafsson studied mobile phone habits among 56 [young adults](#) who text message on a daily basis. Half of the subjects reported problems with the neck, arms or hands, while the other half had no such symptoms.

'Considering how much we use the small mobile phone keypads, it is important that we learn how they affect our bodies. We need to identify factors related to mobile phone usage that may affect our health and ability to work', says Gustafsson.

Her thesis shows that [mobile phone](#) users with neck, arm or hand symptoms tend to use their mobile phones differently than seen in a healthy control group.

'Those with symptoms more often text messaged hunched over. Just like when using a computer,

such posture should be avoided', says Gustafsson.

Subjects with neck, arm or hand problems tended to use one thumb to text instead of two. The one thumb was therefore used with a higher speed and was given fewer breaks.

'It was fascinating to see how fast some individuals could use their thumbs and still find the right letters. Those with symptoms should use both thumbs to reduce the stress on their hands, but these individuals instead use the single-thumb technique to a larger extent than those without problems', says Gustafsson.

There were also differences in terms of work technique, thumb movements and muscular activity. The thumb movements were assessed with a so-called electrogoniometer, and the muscular activity was analysed through [electromyography](#) (using electrodes to measure electrical activity in muscles).

Gustafsson also interviewed 25 young adults who use mobile phones and computers extensively to communicate.

'These people use the technology as a tool to be and act in the present, to be social, effective and independent with almost unlimited possibilities. But there are also risks. Those interviewed related health risks to long-term usage, bad work posture and reduced physical activity', says Gustafsson.

ERGONOMICALLY CORRECT TEXT MESSAGING

Don't sit in the same position for a long time; instead try to vary your position. Use the chair's backrest. Relieve your forearms by resting them against a desk or your thighs. Use both thumbs. Avoid hunching over for a long time. Give your thumbs a break when typing long messages. Don't type too fast.

Source: University of Gothenburg ([news](#) : [web](#))

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