

Prevent injury from repeated motion

Judy Bastien

jbastien@theadvertiser.com

When Claudia LaBorde first became an occupational therapist, about 27 years ago, she saw a lot of serious injuries to the hand, arm and shoulder, such as crush injuries and cut tendons.

Those still exist, but have decreased because of better safety regulations and practices on the job.

"What we see more often, now, is cumulative trauma, repetitive stress injuries, like carpal tunnel syndrome or tendonitis, from overuse or using the hand improperly."

That's what happened to Lynn Chaves, a patient at LaBorde Therapy.

"Too much mouse action," she said.

At first, Chaves wasn't able to lift her arm to eat, but after taking anti-inflammatory medications and undergoing three weeks of therapy, she's had significant improvement.

Adults aren't the only ones who are becoming the victims of repetitive strain injuries.

Children who play video games in excess can develop a condition called DeQuervain's tenosynovitis, a hard-to-pronounce way of describing an irritation of the tendon sheath.

"It's a common thing that happens with the thumb extensors and serious neck problems can

develop," LaBorde said.

The key is to prevent these common injuries before they happen — or at least before they become too serious.

LaBorde has these suggestions for better work and play habits for using computers or video games:

- If you have pain during an activity, stop. Pain is the body's way of letting you know that you are overextending a muscle group.

- Use a neutral grip when holding any device. In a neutral grip, the wrist is straight, allowing for a greater range of motion.

- Take a break every few minutes or switch to another activity.

- If possible, place pil-

lows in your lap and rest your arms on them or use a device supporter on a desk or tabletop. This allows you to keep your head in a more upright position and decrease neck strain. The pillows or desk help to support the arms so they don't have to be held up in the air.

- Sit in an appropriate chair: Use a chair that allows you to put your feet comfortably on the floor and provides good back support.

- Switch hands frequently and vary the use of fingers. This allows one hand to rest and avoid fatigue.

- Frequently look away from the screen and focus on a distant object to help reduce eye fatigue.