



*This Information Sheet should help to alleviate any health concerns you may have regarding the use of display screen equipment. It forms part of a series of Information Sheets which supports the Safe Use of Computers (DSE) Policy Standard.*



**Q. Am I at risk?**

A. Display Screen Equipment (DSE) has been blamed - often wrongly - for a range of health problems. In fact, only a small proportion of DSE users suffer ill health as a result of their work. If problems do occur, they are usually caused by the way in which the DSE is used, rather than the DSE itself. So problems can be avoided by good workplace and job design, and by the way you use your DSE.

**Q. Are aches and pains caused by using a DSE? What about 'RSI'?**

A. Some users get aches and pains in their hands, wrists, arms, neck, shoulders or back, especially after long periods of uninterrupted DSE work. 'Repetitive strain injury' (RSI) has become a popular term for these aches, pains and disorders, but can be misleading, meaning different things to different people. A better medical name for this group of conditions is 'upper limb disorders', which usually do not last, but in a few cases may become persistent or disabling.

**Q. How can I avoid these aches, pains and disorders?**

A. Such problems may have a physical cause, but may also be more likely if a DSE user feels stressed by their work (see next question). If you get aches or pains you should alert your Supervisor or Line Manager.

Problems can often be avoided by good workplace design, so that you can work comfortably, and by good working practices e.g. frequent short breaks from the DSE. Prevention is easiest if action is taken early, before the problem has become serious. For more about how to avoid trouble, see the Information Sheet Making Adjustments to Suit Your Needs.

**Q. What can be done to reduce stress in my DSE work?**

A. DSE users sometimes complain of stress, but this usually arises from an increased pace of work or pressure to meet deadlines, not the DSE itself. Some DSE users find stress reduced because DSE makes their job easier or more interesting, but for others, stress becomes worse, especially when a system does not work or the user does not feel in control or competent to operate it.

Employers can help overcome stress by providing the right training, and by designing systems and tasks to match the abilities of the people who work with them.

**Q. Can DSE work affect my eyesight?**

A. There is no evidence DSE causes disease or permanent damage to eyes. However, long spells of DSE work can cause tired eyes and discomfort. Also, by giving your eyes more demanding tasks, it might make you aware of an eyesight problem you had not noticed.

You can help your eyes by ensuring your DSE is well positioned and properly adjusted, and that the workplace lighting is suitable. Ask for an eye test if you still think there is a problem.

**Q. What about problems with my contact lenses or bifocals?**

A. The heat generated by DSE can make the air seem drier, and some contact lens wearers find this uncomfortable. If you have this problem but don't want to change to glasses, try blinking more often or using tear-substitute drops. Where the air is dry, employers can help by taking steps to increase the humidity.

DSE users must be able to see the screen without having to raise or lower their head. People with bifocals may find them unsuitable for DSE work. If you can't work comfortably with them, consult your optician or doctor as you may need different glasses.

**Q. Can DSE work cause headaches?**

A. Headaches may result from several potential DSE issues:

- Screen glare
- Poor image quality
- A need for different spectacles
- Stress from the pace of work
- Anxiety about new technology
- Reading the screen for long periods without a break
- Poor posture
- A combination of these

Many of these things can easily be put right once the cause of the problem has been found.

**Q. How long should I work with a DSE?**

A. There is no legal limit, but you need to break up long spells of DSE work. How long you should work without a break depends on the type of work you are doing.

**Q. Does DSE give out harmful radiation?**

A. No. DSE gives out visible light, which enables us to see the screen, and other forms of electromagnetic radiation which is only harmful above certain levels. The levels of radiation emitted from DSE are well below the safe levels set out in international recommendations so DSE radiation level checks are not required. You also do not need special devices such as spectacles, screens or aprons when using it.

**Q. What should I do if I'm pregnant?**

A. You don't need to stop working with DSE. Past concern, about reports of miscarriages and birth defects among some groups of DSE workers, has not been borne out by recent research. Many scientific studies have now been carried out and, taken as a whole, do not show any link between miscarriages or birth defects and working with DSE.

If you are anxious about your DSE or about work generally during pregnancy, you should talk to your doctor or Health and Safety Services.

**Q. Can working with DSE cause skin disorders?**

A. This is rare with only a few people experiencing irritation e.g. rashes or other skin problems when working with DSE. The exact cause is not known, but it seems possible a combination of dry air, static electricity and individual susceptibility may be involved. If this is the case, increase the humidity or allow more fresh air into the room.

**Q. Can DSE trigger epileptic fits?**

A. Most people with epilepsy are completely unaffected by DSE. A few who suffer from photo-sensitive epilepsy and are susceptible to flickering lights and striped patterns may be affected in some circumstances, but even they can often work successfully with DSE.

**Q. Are there any precautions I should take when using a laptop?**

A. Laptops and other portables have to be compact and easy to carry. The resulting design features, like small keyboards, can make prolonged use uncomfortable, unless steps are taken to avoid problems, e.g. use a docking station.

Try to avoid using a portable on its own if full-sized equipment is available, and like other DSE users, people who habitually use a portable should be trained how to minimise risks. This includes sitting comfortably, angling the screen so it can be seen clearly with minimal reflections, and taking frequent breaks if work is prolonged. Wherever possible, portables should be placed on a firm surface at the right height for keying.

**Q. Is it true using a mouse can cause problems?**

A. Intensive use of a mouse, trackball, or similar pointing device may give rise to aches and pains in the fingers, hands, wrists, arms or shoulders. This can also happen with a keyboard, but mouse work concentrates activity on one hand and arm (and one or two fingers), and this may make problems more likely. Risks can be reduced by adopting a good posture and technique.

Try to limit the time you spend using the mouse. Take frequent breaks - even short pauses to relax your arm can help, as can periods using the keyboard or doing non-computer work. Place the mouse close, so it can be used with a relaxed arm and straight wrist. It can help to support your arm, for example on the desk surface or arm of a chair. If you still find using the mouse awkward, you could try a different shaped or sized one, or another device such as a trackball.

**Additional Information**

Further information and guidance on DSE issues can be found on our website at [hss.bangor.ac.uk](http://hss.bangor.ac.uk)