

Ergonomics for jewellery artists

Part two: Injury prevention

Last month Helen Kaut discussed how to create a back-friendly work space, this follow-up article focuses on how to work on your designs without causing muscular aches and pains



If you are like me you tend to get engrossed in your work, forgetting time and just trying to get your project finished. Unfortunately this way of working is often counterproductive as it can lead to muscular pains and fatigue. So here is some advice to keep you working healthily.

Take regular breaks

This seems like obvious advice to some readers, but taking breaks is crucial to any kind of manual and intellectual work, but often you simply tend to forget to have a break. Staying too long in one position can lead to pain and muscle strain. If taking a break doesn't come naturally to you, here is a way to implement regular breaks; set your alarm clock to ring every 15 to 30 minutes. According Occupational Health Physiotherapist Pauline Cole it's important to take breaks before the pain starts rather than trying to get rid of it. Setting yourself a time when you finish working for the day is advised, be realistic if you have a deadline looming and add in the appropriate time needed to complete your work.

Rotate your tasks

Different tasks use different muscle groups; so it's important that you don't spend the whole time just doing one task. Sawing out intricate details in a piece of metal requires different muscles than polishing, soldering or beadwork. Alternate between the tasks that are physically more demanding and ones that are easier to accomplish. If you work with different techniques and materials rotation might be already something you incorporate in your daily routine. Alternate between standing and sitting positions as well.

Take physical exercise

To keep your body in shape and prevent muscular pain it's worth taking up some form of sport or exercise. Pilates, Tai Chi and Yoga are gentle exercises that involve the whole body. If you prefer more vigorous exercise that keeps your heart rate up going jogging and swimming (back stroke) are another option that keep you fit.

What to do when you experience pain

Heat in form of microwaveable wheat bags and massages can give you relief; if possible why not treat yourself to a relaxing massage, once a month. However, if you experience serious pain you should go to your doctor as soon as possible. The pain needs to be dealt with early on to avoid it becoming chronic. Your doctor will advise you on painkillers, exercises and rest and may refer you to a physiotherapist. Your doctor will possibly advise you to take a longer break from making jewellery until you have fully recovered. So please heed his or her advice - even if you find it hard to resist going back to your bench or table.

Exercises you can do in your breaks

Pauline Cole recommends the following easy exercises. They are no substitute for regular breaks and you should not try them if you are already in pain. When you do these exercises you should only feel a stretch. If you feel pain or discomfort stop immediately and seek advice from your GP or a chartered physiotherapist. Repeat these exercises five to ten times.

1. Shrug your shoulder by raising them up to your ears and lower them down again. Next – circle your shoulders by raising them gently up to your ears and then rolling them backwards in a circle
2. Turn your head slowly to the right while keeping your eyes focused in a straight line and repeat on the other side.
3. Keep your eyes focussed straight ahead while bending your neck to the right. Bring your right ear closer to your shoulder. If you want to increase the stretch use your right hand on your head to help lower your ear. Hold this position for about five seconds and repeat on the other side. Only increase the stretch if it does not hurt or cause any discomfort.

4. Make sure that you do not clasp your hands together or pull on your neck for the following exercise: Place your hands loosely behind your head and squeeze your shoulder blades together, while pushing your elbows back. Hold this for five to ten seconds, pause and repeat.

5. Link your fingers together gently and with your elbows straight turn the palms of your hands away from you. Gently stretch your fingers, arm and shoulder muscles. Hold this position for five to ten seconds.

6. Again gently link your fingers together and with your elbows straight reach forward with your arms. Stretch your arms, wrists and fingers and hold for five to ten seconds.

7. Stand upright and place your palms on your lower back. Keep your legs and knees straight and slowly arch your back.

Warming up your hands before you start your work is also a good idea to help prevent injury.

resources

To find an occupational health physiotherapist - The Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Occupational Health and Ergonomics www.acpohe.org.uk/

Here is a website that shows simple and effective yoga exercises you can do in your breaks www.will-harris.com/yogaindex.html

The following websites show some useful exercises www.handexercise.org/strength-exercises www.stretchnow.co.uk/exercises/hands.php

CONTACT DETAILS

Helenka White Design
www.helenkawhitedesign.co.uk

Disclaimer: By no means does this article constitute medical advice; if you are in pain please see your doctor