

Writing & Pens

Writing can be a real problem for people with RSI. "My forearm would become really sore after writing just a few words" says one member. "Fortunately, after a few months with a really good massage therapist, I was able to write for longer, but I still have to be careful about using the right pen in the right way."

First, it's important to relax your grip on the pen. If you have your first finger in a bow shape as it presses on the pen, you are holding the pen too hard. Try gripping the pen in the normal way and then relaxing your hold so that the pen slides easily between your fingers. You will still be able to write, and the load on your muscles will be lighter. Ergonomists recommend "the tripod grip", in which you rest your middle finger as well as your first finger on the pen. It takes a bit of getting used to but it takes the pressure off your first finger.

Secondly, your shoulders and arms need to be relaxed too. To achieve this, the writing surface needs to be at the right height; it's often too high. Try writing with the pad on your lap to get a feel for relaxed shoulders and then adjust your chair or table height to achieve this.

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Most people with RSI prefer a pen that requires very little effort to use, generally a roller ball rather than a ball-point. Up to now, these have been relatively expensive at around \$5.00 each. For example, the Uniball Micro Deluxe is a favourite with many of us at \$4.99. Recently, however, much cheaper 'ergonomic' pens have begun to appear at your local supermarket. Many claim to be "high comfort" and to provide a more "controlled" and "smooth" writing experience.

We asked our committee members to try out two of these, the BIC Atlantis and the Papermate Inkjoy. The verdict was pretty clear: "a waste of money" said one, "not worth the bother" said another. The problem is these cheap pens are don't write nearly as smoothly as their more expensive counterparts. Another cheap pen is the BIC Triumph. This is a bit better than the other two; it writes more smoothly, and at \$5.29 for two, it's worth a try.



BIC Triumph

Thickness is another issue with pens; people with RSI usually prefer a thick soft gripping area. This is relatively easy to achieve, particularly on a retractable pen without a cap, like the excellent Uniball Jetstream; just wrap bubble wrap or thin sponge from a craft shop around the pen and secure with tape or a rubber band. You can also buy pens with a built-in soft grip. Thickness is another issue with pens; people with RSI usually prefer a thick soft gripping area. This is relatively easy to achieve, particularly on a retractable pen without a cap, like the excellent Uniball Jetstream; just wrap bubble wrap or thin sponge from a craft shop around the pen and secure with tape or a rubber band. You can also buy pens with a built-in soft grip. Although we haven't tried it, the Ring Pen might also be worth a try. The Ring Pen is designed to fit the human hand and reduce fatigue and cramping when writing for long periods of time. While it takes the strain off the fingers, it may increase strain on the rest of the arm.



Ring Pen

THE RIGHT WAY

Ergonomist Anne Kramer says:

Relax the shoulders and neck, and sit up straight. Students who hunch down over their papers often experience neck, back, and shoulder pain.

Keep the elbow open at more than 90 degrees. To accommodate this writing prevents wrist pain and protects against carpal tunnel.

Grip the pen or pencil as lightly as possible. Squeezing too hard not only causes pain in the hand and fingers, but it also can result in the grip slipping too close to the tip of the writing instrument.

Use the shoulder, rather than the hand or elbow, to move across the page. The greater strength of the shoulder muscles mean that they fatigue less quickly than the wrist and elbow.



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