



HEALTH & WELLNESS / LIFESTYLE

It's Time to Help Patients With Their No. 1 Health Issue: Screen Overload

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Meet Computer Jo. I introduce Jo to my students and graduates by drawing a crazy figure on a flip chart or blackboard. Jo is all hunched up in front of the computer screen, eyes bugging out. His/her neck juts out like a turkey. Jo's lower back is killing him/her. Coffee cups dot the desk. Jo stops from time to time to squint at an iPhone and texts rapidly before returning to the computer keyboard.

Yikes! It's after midnight! Jo's wrist and thumb hurt like hell. Early signs of [carpal tunnel syndrome](#)?¹ Text thumb? Jo slouches home and tries to unwind in front of the TV because sleep is impossible.

Sound familiar? We've all met Jo, right? We've encouraged Jo to experiment with split keyboards, an anti-glare screen, and especially an anti-blue-light hangover filter to prevent a disruption in circadian rhythm to avoid insomnia and daytime fatigue.

Some of you are desperately trying to lay down the law regarding your kids' overuse of computers and iPhones for all of the above reasons. Good luck! Some years ago, I wrote a chapter on computer-related aches and pains in my *Self Shiatsu Handbook*,² so I decided to update those thoughts here as a sequel to my previous column on occupational hazards [[September digital issue](#)]. Just as I encouraged practitioners attend performances of dancers or artists whenever possible to achieve a close-up of their specific aches and pains, it's also helpful to visit Computer Jo at work to check his/her computer station and chair, or ask Jo to take a quick iPhone shot for you, or ask a colleague to take a quick video clip of Jo at work!



How to Help Computer Jo, Asian Bodywork Style

I developed an entire ABT routine for chair work so my students could spread out around high-tech companies and offer a Computer Jo package. Here are some examples:

- Rotate Jo's arms before stretching her/his arms vertically and horizontally, one at a time, while holding GB21. This not only relaxes the upper body, but also encourages deep breathing and releases a "hunched" position.
- Support Jo's occiput in "tiger's mouth," focusing alternating pressure between UB 10 and GB 20. Ask Jo to follow your finger in a wide arc with his/her eyes. Then, ask Jo to turn his/her head to follow your finger as you move it in an arc once again, very slowly. This will soon ease neck tension.
- Gently squeeze down the back of Jo's neck before palpating Back Shu points UB 11,13,14 and 15 several times ... or until Jo says, *Aaaaaaaah!*
- Step back and ask Jo to roll his/her shoulders and wrists several times.
- To ease eye strain, encourage Jo to pinch the bridge of his /her nose to access UB 1, and to pinch the eyebrows from UB 2 across to SJ 23.

General Tips

Encourage Jo to rise every hour or so from his/her desk to stretch. Look away from the computer screen into natural light - or pin a favorite family photo or artwork above or beside the screen to encourage an occasional glance away from the screen.

Also make sure Jo's computer screen is at least 2 feet away, and that the keyboard is neither too high nor too low. Check Jo's chair.

A Case Study: "Betsy Z"

Meet engineer "Betsy Z," who requested an office visit the day her neck locked facing right. It

wasn't hard to figure out why: Her computer screen was on the right side of her desk, and there was a constant draft from a fan hitting her left shoulder and neck. Bizarre, I know, but Betsy had never made the connection until I pointed it out to her.

I worked initially on Betsy's feet to ease whole-body tension and stiffness before focusing on her neck and shoulders. We then tackled her desk, shifted clutter and adjusted her monitor stand so she could face the screen without twisting. We moved the mouse and phone from the right to the left side to balance hand and arm activity, and added a chunk of quartz to enhance good *qi* flow on her desk.

I brought a cup shaped like a squashed face to encourage Betsy to drink more water and glance away from the screen occasionally. I also doubled a cushion on her chair to support her lower back and taught Betsy to apply thumb pressure to Kidney Back Shu UB 23 to make life a little more comfortable. Oh, and it was easy to encourage Betsy to roll a tennis or squash ball back and forth under her feet to keep leg *qi* moving.

Betsy's co-workers used large exercise balls as chairs or opted to stand at elevated computer stations. But for sentimental reasons, Betsy opted to keep using a swivel chair she had salvaged off a NYC pier years before.

In spite of using an anti-glare filter, Betsy experienced eye strain and headaches, so I taught her simple acupressure techniques for GB 20, GB21, UB 1, UB2 and SJ 23.

Next time she felt a headache approaching, I suggested she twist a towel in hot water, hold it under her occiput, tilt her head back, and then use the knotted, heated towel to apply pressure across each shoulder. Press to a count of five, release to a count of five, with extra focus on GB 21. (Oh, as long as she wasn't pregnant, as GB 21 is a wonderful point to press during L&D for a potent downward yang movement!)

The Impact of Blue Light

I interviewed Austin-based eye doctor Mark Schaper, OD, and chiropractor Mike Bandy, DC. Both emphasized the harmfulness of "blue light" from computer overuse. Dr. Schaper suggested glasses with a "blue blocking filter" or reflective coating to help reduce stress to retinal cells (even more advisable after cataract surgery). Dr. Schaper also mentioned that kids who have more playtime outside and less computer overload actually experience less myopia.

Computer / Internet Addiction?

Google the term. All kinds of definitions, advice and resources pop up. Internet addiction specialist /psychologist Dr. Kimberly S. Young offers a useful checklist³ to determine whether or not your Computer Jo clients [have a problem](#). Ask questions such as:

- Do you become moody, restless or irritable when you stop or decrease Internet use?
- Does your Internet use have a negative impact on your relationships and/or job?
- Does the Internet serve as an escape from problems?

If the answer is yes to any of the above, advise Computer Jo to seek group or cognitive behavior therapy – and to avoid online chat rooms, as they only compound the problem.

References

1. Markova I, Korostyshevskiy V. "Acupuncture for Carpal Tunnel." *Acupuncture Today*, April 2019.

2. Ferguson P. *The Self Shiatsu Handbook*. New York, NY: Berkley-Perigee, 1995.
3. Young KS. "Internet Addict Diagnostic Questionnaire." PsychGuides.com, 2019.

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