

# When typing becomes a pain in the hands

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The pain in my fingers started in January 1991. I ignored it. After all, I had been using computers for more than a decade, and I never had any problems before. Tendinitis, carpal tunnel and other repetitive motion problems happened to other people, I thought.

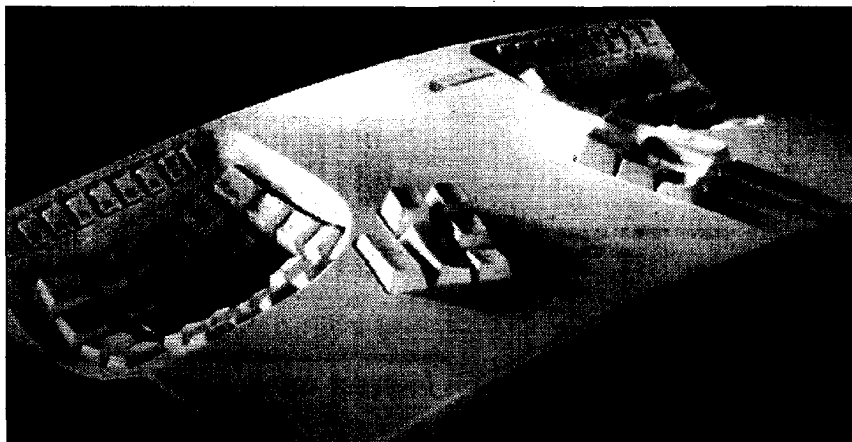
Indeed, a few weeks later, the pain went away. But it came back with a vengeance that August. I was on deadline, working on a book and two magazine articles. Just when I needed to type the most, my fingers were immobilized with agony. It was more than six months before I could type again.

Since then, I've been more careful. I take frequent breaks when I'm working; I shortened the legs on my desk so that it is at correct typing height. Although that helped, my hands didn't really get better until I switched computers - and keyboards.

Today I use an Apple Adjustable Keyboard. It has a pivot in the middle that splits the keyboard into two parts. When I sit down to type, I put my arms on the arm rests of my ergonomic chair, extend my arms to their natural position and adjust the keyboard to whatever angle feels good. I frequently change the position of the keyboard while I'm working.

Unfortunately, Apple Computer Inc. recently moved production of the Adjustable Keyboard overseas, so it's nearly impossible to find one in the United States (another in a long series of stupid marketing decisions). But a number of other companies now make ergonomic keyboards. With the exception of Apple's, all work with PCs, although extra-priced adaptors are needed to let some work with Macs as well.

Two of the most popular ergonomic key-



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boards are the Comfort Keyboard System, manufactured by Health Care Keyboard Co., and the Kinesis Keyboard, manufactured by Kinesis. While each takes a different approach, I know of people who have used both with success. The Comfort Keyboard looks like a cross between a traditional keyboard and an Erector Set. The keyboard is split into three parts - the left hand keys, right hand keys, and the keypad - which are mounted on universal balljoints. You can adjust each section's position and tilt. A big gear on the keyboard's base lets you move the sections closer together or farther apart. Price: \$795 for PC, Mac, and a variety of Unix workstations as well.

The Kinesis Keyboard is an oversized console with a well for each hand. As an option, you can get a foot pad to relieve your fingers from having to press the shift or control keys. The keyboard isn't adjustable. Nevertheless, it has a big following. Price: \$390 for PC and \$490 for the Mac.

For a more conventional alternative keyboard that's easier on your pocketbook, check out the Select-Ease, manufactured by Lexmark (formerly part of IBM). The keyboard has two sections connected by a pivot. You can adjust angle as well as the height. It's \$179 for PC.

Finally, there's the Microsoft Natural Keyboard, a basic ergonomic keyboard priced at \$99. The Microsoft keyboard is contoured to match an adult's hands, but it is not adjustable. Nevertheless, many users report it is more comfortable than the conventional keyboard it hopes to replace.

Before you decide to buy, try out a few different designs. I know of people who love the Comfort Keyboard but can't stand the Kinesis. And I know people who say that the Kinesis has made it possible for them to work again.

If you have access to the Internet, check out <http://www.cs.princeton.edu/dwallach/tifaq/>. It includes photographs and reviews

### Ergonomic keyboards

**Apple Adjustable Keyboard**  
Apple Computer Inc.  
Cupertino, Calif.  
\$99. (No longer manufactured in US; must be special-ordered)

**Comfort Keyboard System**  
Health Care Keyboard Co., Inc.  
12040G West Feerick St.  
Wauwatosa, Wis. 53222  
414-536-2160  
\$795 (PC, Mac, Sun and others)

**Kinesis Keyboard**  
Kinesis  
2232 17th Ave. SE  
Bothell, Wash. 98021  
800-454-6374; 206-402-8100  
\$390 (PC); \$490 (Mac).

**Select-Ease/Lexmark**  
740 New Circle Rd., NW  
Lexington, Ky. 40511-1876  
800-358-5835; 606-232-2000  
\$179 (PC)

**Microsoft Natural Keyboard**  
Microsoft Corp.  
One Microsoft Way  
Redmond, Wash. 98052-6399  
\$99

of alternative keyboards and pointers to support groups. For an excellent set of Web pages designed to teach people how to avoid RSI, check out <http://www.engr.unl.edu/ee/eeshop/rsi.html>.

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