

DESK DOCTOR

DESK DOCTOR GUIDE · RECOVERY

# Work *recovery* guide

Ice, heat, massage and support protocols for each area desk work strains — matched to how long it's been hurting.

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Get to the root cause

The free assessment finds what in your setup is driving the pain.

TAKE THE FREE ASSESSMENT

BEFORE YOU START

# Important medical *disclaimer*

This guide provides general information only and does not replace professional medical advice. Consult your physician, physical therapist or care team before beginning any pain management routine. If pain is severe, persistent or worsening, seek medical attention promptly. Some conditions need professional diagnosis and treatment that self-care alone cannot address.

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

1. Read the basics on page 3 once — ice vs heat, what to expect and when to stop.

2. Jump to the page for each area that hurts and use the protocol that matches your phase.

3. Fix what's causing it. Recovery tools manage symptoms; your desk setup decides whether they come back.

> **DESK DOCTOR NOTE**
> Self-care should complement, never replace, fixing the posture and equipment issues behind your discomfort.

## FIND YOUR AREA


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Find what's driving the pain

The free Desk Doctor assessment checks your chair, desk, screens, input devices and movement in about 10 minutes, then emails a personalized report.

TAKE THE ASSESSMENT

PAIN MANAGEMENT BASICS

# Ice, heat & what to expect

These are common self-care strategies for desk-related pain. Learn the basics once, then go to the page for the area that hurts.

## ICE — 0–72 HRS OR ACUTE FLARE-UPS

- Reduces swelling
- Numbs acute pain
- Constricts blood vessels to limit swelling
- 15–20 min on, 45–60 min off, repeat as needed

## HEAT — CHRONIC STIFFNESS

- Increases blood flow
- Relaxes tight muscles and fascia
- Eases chronic stiffness
- 15–20 min, then let skin return to normal temperature

## RECOVERY TIMELINE

### Acute · 0–72 hours

- Ice and gentle movement
- No heat or aggressive massage
- Expect some improvement within 3–5 days with proper care

### Subacute · 3 days–6 weeks

- Alternate ice and heat
- Add gentle massage and more movement
- Gradual return to normal activity

### Chronic · 6+ weeks

- Heat and regular massage
- Prevention through exercise and setup changes
- Physical therapy if no improvement

## SAFETY

- Stop at once if numbness, more pain or skin irritation occurs
- No heat on swollen areas or fresh injuries
- Limit electronic massage to 15–20 minutes
- Take braces off periodically for normal movement and circulation

## RED FLAGS — SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION

- Severe pain that doesn't ease with rest and basic care
- Numbness or tingling that persists or worsens
- Loss of strength or function
- Pain with fever
- Symptoms worsening over 24–48 hours
- Any concern about the nature or severity of your symptoms

Recovery tools manage symptoms. Your setup prevents the next flare.
Use this guide alongside the changes in your Desk Doctor report. No report yet? It's free.
TAKE THE ASSESSMENT

RECOVERY PROTOCOL

# Headaches & migraines

**Equipment** Head wrap (ice/heat) · neck/shoulder heat pad · massage ball · ergonomic pillow

## ICE · Migraines and acute headaches

RANKED PICKS →

- Cold on the forehead, temples or base of the skull
- 15–20 min on, 30–45 min off, repeat as needed
- Use in a dark, quiet room when possible

## HEAT · Tension headaches

RANKED PICKS →

- Heat on the neck and upper shoulders to relax tight muscles
- 15–20 minutes
- Can alternate with cold on the forehead or temples

## MASSAGE BALL · Base of the skull

RANKED PICKS →

- Ball against a wall at the suboccipital muscles
- Gentle pressure 30–60 sec, roll slowly

## MANUAL TECHNIQUE · Fingertips and thumbs

- Gentle circles at the temples
- Thumb pressure at the base of the skull
- Quiet room, 5–10 minutes maximum
- **Electronic massage:** generally not recommended — vibration can worsen headaches

## ERGONOMIC PILLOW · Sleep position

RANKED PICKS →

- Cervical support pillow keeps the natural neck curve during sleep
- Side sleeping: the pillow fills the gap between neck and mattress
- Back sleeping: it supports the neck curve without pushing the head forward
- Replace every 12–18 months or when it loses shape



### WHICH PHASE ARE YOU IN?

**0–72 hrs:** ice, gentle movement.
**3 days–6 wks:** alternate ice and heat, add massage.
**6+ wks:** heat, massage, fix the setup. Details pg. 3

### EQUIPMENT WE RANKED

Ice & heat packs →
Massagers & massage balls →
Ergonomic pillows →

## Treat the cause, not just the symptom

Screen glare, brightness and monitor height are common desk triggers. The free assessment checks all three.

TAKE THE ASSESSMENT

### STOP AND SEE A CLINICIAN

Numbness or weakness that persists, pain with fever, or symptoms worsening over 24–48 hours.

RECOVERY PROTOCOL

# Neck pain

**Equipment** Electronic massager · massage ball · neck/shoulder ice and heat pads · ergonomic pillow

## ICE · Acute pain or injury

RANKED PICKS →

- 15–20 min every hour while awake for the first 48–72 hours
- Chronic flare-ups: 15–20 min after aggravating activity
- Cover the most painful area and surrounding muscles

## HEAT · Chronic stiffness

RANKED PICKS →

- 15–20 min before stretching or massage
- Morning stiffness: heat on waking
- Focus on the neck and upper shoulders

## ELECTRONIC MASSAGER · Chronic stiffness

RANKED PICKS →

1. Heat 15–20 min first
2. Massage 15 min on the lowest setting
3. Upper trapezius only — avoid the spine itself
4. Ice afterward if soreness develops

## MASSAGE BALL · Subacute or chronic

RANKED PICKS →

1. Ball against a wall on upper-trap trigger points
2. Gentle pressure 30–60 sec per point
3. Roll slowly along the neck–shoulder junction
4. 2–3 times daily, 10–15 minutes

## ERGONOMIC PILLOW · Sleep position

RANKED PICKS →

- Cervical support pillow keeps the natural neck curve during sleep
- Side sleeping: the pillow fills the gap between neck and mattress
- Back sleeping: it supports the neck curve without pushing the head forward
- Replace every 12–18 months or when it loses shape



### WHICH PHASE ARE YOU IN?

**0–72 hrs:** ice, gentle movement.
**3 days–6 wks:** alternate ice and heat, add massage.
**6+ wks:** heat, massage, fix the setup. Details pg. 3

### EQUIPMENT WE RANKED

Ice & heat packs →
Massagers & massage balls →
Ergonomic pillows →

### Treat the cause, not just the symptom

Neck pain at a desk most often tracks with monitor height and a forward head. The assessment flags both.

TAKE THE ASSESSMENT

### STOP AND SEE A CLINICIAN

Numbness or weakness that persists, pain with fever, or symptoms worsening over 24–48 hours.

RECOVERY PROTOCOL

# Shoulder pain

**Equipment** Electronic massager · massage ball · ice and heat pads · posture brace

## ICE · Acute injury

RANKED PICKS →

- 15–20 min every 2–3 hours for the first 48–72 hours
- After aggravating activity: 15–20 minutes

## HEAT · Chronic tension

RANKED PICKS →

- 15–20 min before massage or stretching
- Morning stiffness: heat on waking

## ELECTRONIC MASSAGER · Chronic tension

RANKED PICKS →

- Not in the first 48–72 hours after an injury
- Heat 15 min, then massage 15 min on medium
- Upper trapezius and back of the shoulder
- 1–2 times daily maximum

## MASSAGE BALL · Against a wall

RANKED PICKS →

- Target upper-trap trigger points
- Sustained pressure 60–90 sec per point
- Roll along the shoulder blade edges
- Up to 3–4 times daily, 10 minutes

## POSTURE BRACE · Gentle reminder

RANKED PICKS →

- Start with 2–3 hours a day; build to a 6–8 hour daily maximum
- Take it off for 30 minutes every 2–3 hours so your muscles keep working
- Straps should remind, not restrict breathing
- Wear it for posture-heavy tasks: computer work, driving
- Pair with strengthening — the brace is support, not a substitute
- Stop if you notice skin irritation, more pain or breathing difficulty
- Taper off as awareness and strength improve



**WHICH PHASE ARE YOU IN?**

**0–72 hrs:** ice, gentle movement.
**3 days–6 wks:** alternate ice and heat, add massage.
**6+ wks:** heat, massage, fix the setup. Details pg. 3

**EQUIPMENT WE RANKED**

Ice & heat packs →
Massagers & massage balls →
Posture correctors →

## Treat the cause, not just the symptom

Shoulder tension often follows a keyboard or mouse set too high or too far away. The assessment measures your reach.

TAKE THE ASSESSMENT

**STOP AND SEE A CLINICIAN**

Numbness or weakness that persists, pain with fever, or symptoms worsening over 24–48 hours.

RECOVERY PROTOCOL

# Elbow pain *(tennis / golfer's)*

**Equipment** Elbow brace · ice and heat wrap · massage ball · ice massage ball

## ICE · Acute flare-ups

RANKED PICKS →

- 15–20 min every 2–3 hours
- After aggravating activity: ice right away, 15–20 min
- Outer elbow (tennis) or inner elbow (golfer's)

## HEAT · Before stretching

RANKED PICKS →

- 10–15 min to prepare tissues
- Chronic stiffness: 15–20 min before activity
- Heat the forearm muscles, not an inflamed tendon

## ICE MASSAGE · Acute phase

RANKED PICKS →

- Ice massage ball on elbow and forearm muscles
- Circular strokes, 5–10 minutes
- Focus on forearm trigger points
- 2–3 times daily

## BRACE · During aggravating tasks

RANKED PICKS →

- Tennis elbow: strap 1–2 inches below the joint
- Take it off 2–3 hours daily to keep muscles strong
- Support without cutting off circulation

## MASSAGE BALL · Forearm

RANKED PICKS →

- Roll the forearm gently; avoid the elbow joint
- 30–60 sec on each tight spot
- **Electronic massage:** generally not recommended — vibration may irritate tendons



### WHICH PHASE ARE YOU IN?

**0–72 hrs:** ice, gentle movement.
**3 days–6 wks:** alternate ice and heat, add massage.
**6+ wks:** heat, massage, fix the setup. Details pg. 3

### EQUIPMENT WE RANKED

Ice & heat packs →

Braces & supports →

Massagers & massage balls →

## Treat the cause, not just the symptom

Elbow pain at a desk often tracks with mouse grip and forearm rotation. The assessment matches you to a mouse style.

TAKE THE ASSESSMENT

### STOP AND SEE A CLINICIAN

Numbness or weakness that persists, pain with fever, or symptoms worsening over 24–48 hours.

RECOVERY PROTOCOL · CONTINUED PG. 9

# Wrist & hand pain

**Equipment** Wrist brace · ice and heat wrap · massage ball · ice massage ball

## ICE · Acute pain or swelling

RANKED PICKS →

- 15–20 min every 2–3 hours
- After repetitive work: ice right away, 15–20 min
- Most painful areas of wrist and forearm

## HEAT · Before stretching

RANKED PICKS →

- 10–15 min to prepare tissues
- Morning stiffness: heat on waking
- Warm soaks or heat packs on forearms and hands

## ICE MASSAGE · Flare-ups

RANKED PICKS →

- Ice massage ball along forearm flexors and extensors
- 5–8 minutes, 2–3 times daily
- Focus on trigger points that refer to the wrist

## BRACE · Finger, thumb or wrist

RANKED PICKS →

- Acute symptoms: wear during sleep and computer work
- Keep the wrist neutral in the brace
- Remove every 2–3 hours for gentle movement
- Replace when loose or worn

## MASSAGE BALL · Palm and forearm

RANKED PICKS →

- Roll under palm and fingers, light pressure
- Thumb-side and pinky-side palm muscles
- Forearm muscles — not the wrist joint
- Finger massage: gentle circles on each joint



**WHICH PHASE ARE YOU IN?**

**0–72 hrs:** ice, gentle movement.
**3 days–6 wks:** alternate ice and heat, add massage.
**6+ wks:** heat, massage, fix the setup. Details pg. 3

**EQUIPMENT WE RANKED**

Ice & heat packs →

Braces & supports →

Massagers & massage balls →

Treat the cause, not just the symptom

Wrist and hand symptoms often track with keyboard angle and mouse fit. The assessment filters both to your hand size.

TAKE THE ASSESSMENT

**STOP AND SEE A CLINICIAN**

Numbness or weakness that persists, pain with fever, or symptoms worsening over 24–48 hours.

RECOVERY PROTOCOL · CONTINUED FROM PG. 8

# Wrist & hand: posture & sleep

Hand symptoms don't always start at the hand. Neck and shoulder position, at the desk and in bed, can play a part.

## POSTURE BRACE · Numbness in your hands while working

RANKED PICKS →

- Start with 2–3 hours a day; build to a 6–8 hour daily maximum
- Take it off for 30 minutes every 2–3 hours so your muscles keep working
- Straps should remind, not restrict breathing
- Wear it for posture-heavy tasks: computer work, driving
- Pair with strengthening — the brace is support, not a substitute
- Stop if you notice skin irritation, more pain or breathing difficulty
- Taper off as awareness and strength improve

## ERGONOMIC PILLOW · Waking with numbness or tingling in a hand

RANKED PICKS →

- Cervical support pillow keeps the natural neck curve during sleep
- Side sleeping: the pillow fills the gap between neck and mattress
- Back sleeping: it supports the neck curve without pushing the head forward
- Replace every 12–18 months or when it loses shape

**NUMBNESS IS A SIGNAL**

Numbness or tingling that persists, wakes you at night, or comes with weakness or dropping things needs a medical evaluation. Self-care is a complement, not a substitute.



**WHICH PHASE ARE YOU IN?**

**0–72 hrs:** ice, gentle movement.
**3 days–6 wks:** alternate ice and heat, add massage.
**6+ wks:** heat, massage, fix the setup. Details pg. 3

**EQUIPMENT WE RANKED**

- Posture correctors →
- Ergonomic pillows →
- Braces & supports →

## Treat the cause, not just the symptom

Hand numbness while working or on waking often traces to neck and shoulder position. The assessment checks your posture inputs.

TAKE THE ASSESSMENT

**STOP AND SEE A CLINICIAN**

Numbness or weakness that persists, pain with fever, or symptoms worsening over 24–48 hours.

RECOVERY PROTOCOL

# Upper & mid back pain

**Equipment** Electronic massager · massage ball · massage stick · ice and heat pack · posture brace

## ICE · Acute muscle spasm

RANKED PICKS →

- 15–20 min every 2–3 hours
- After aggravating activity: 15–20 minutes

## HEAT · Chronic tension

RANKED PICKS →

- 15–20 min before massage or stretching
- Morning stiffness: heat on waking

## ELECTRONIC MASSAGER · Chronic tension

RANKED PICKS →

- During a muscle spasm, use ice instead
- Heat 15–20 min, then massage
- Between the shoulder blades and along the upper back

## MASSAGE BALL & STICK · Trigger points

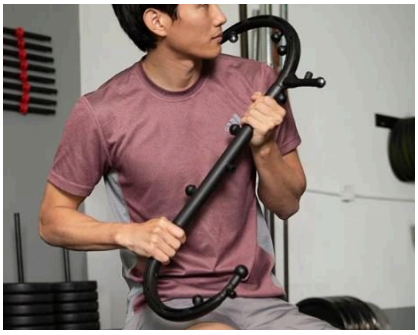
RANKED PICKS →

- Ball between back and wall; hold 60–90 sec, then roll
- Stick: reach overhead for upper traps and rhomboids
- Long strokes along the muscle
- 2–3 times daily, 15 minutes

## POSTURE BRACE · Gentle reminder

RANKED PICKS →

- Start with 2–3 hours a day; build to a 6–8 hour daily maximum
- Take it off for 30 minutes every 2–3 hours so your muscles keep working
- Straps should remind, not restrict breathing
- Wear it for posture-heavy tasks: computer work, driving
- Pair with strengthening — the brace is support, not a substitute
- Stop if you notice skin irritation, more pain or breathing difficulty
- Taper off as awareness and strength improve



### WHICH PHASE ARE YOU IN?

**0–72 hrs:** ice, gentle movement.
**3 days–6 wks:** alternate ice and heat, add massage.
**6+ wks:** heat, massage, fix the setup. Details pg. 3

### EQUIPMENT WE RANKED

Ice & heat packs →
Massagers & massage balls →
Posture correctors →

## Treat the cause, not just the symptom

Upper back fatigue often follows a chair without support or a screen that pulls you forward. The assessment checks both.

TAKE THE ASSESSMENT

### STOP AND SEE A CLINICIAN

Numbness or weakness that persists, pain with fever, or symptoms worsening over 24–48 hours.

RECOVERY PROTOCOL

# Low back pain

**Equipment** Lumbar support · electronic massager · massage ball · ice and heat pack · posture brace

## ICE · Acute pain or spasm

RANKED PICKS →

- 15–20 min every 2–3 hours for the first 48–72 hours
- After aggravating activity: 15–20 minutes

## HEAT · Chronic stiffness

RANKED PICKS →

- 15–20 min before activity or massage
- Morning stiffness: heat on waking

## ELECTRONIC MASSAGER · Never on acute spasms

RANKED PICKS →

- Ice only for the first 48–72 hours
- Then heat 15–20 min before massage
- Massager on the lumbar muscles, not the spine

## MASSAGE BALL · On the floor

RANKED PICKS →

- Lie with the ball under low back muscles
- Body weight controls pressure — start light
- Roll slowly; pause 30–60 sec on tender spots

## LUMBAR SUPPORT · Prolonged sitting

RANKED PICKS →

- Use during long sitting stretches
- Remove every 2–3 hours for movement breaks
- Sits in your natural lumbar curve

## POSTURE BRACE · Gentle reminder

RANKED PICKS →

- Start with 2–3 hours a day; build to a 6–8 hour daily maximum
- Take it off for 30 minutes every 2–3 hours so your muscles keep working
- Pair with strengthening — the brace is support, not a substitute
- Stop if you notice skin irritation, more pain or breathing difficulty



**WHICH PHASE ARE YOU IN?**

**0–72 hrs:** ice, gentle movement.
**3 days–6 wks:** alternate ice and heat, add massage.
**6+ wks:** heat, massage, fix the setup. Details pg. 3

**EQUIPMENT WE RANKED**

- Ice & heat packs →
- Massagers & massage balls →
- Braces & supports →
- Posture correctors →

## Treat the cause, not just the symptom

Low back load depends on lumbar support and recline. The assessment checks your chair.

TAKE THE ASSESSMENT

**STOP AND SEE A CLINICIAN**

Numbness or weakness that persists, pain with fever, or symptoms worsening over 24–48 hours.

RECOVERY PROTOCOL

# Hip pain

**Equipment** Hip ice and heat pack · massage ball

## ICE · Acute hip flexor pain

RANKED PICKS →

- 15–20 min after aggravating activity
- After exercise: ice right away, 15–20 min
- Front of hip (flexors) or side and back (glutes)

## HEAT · Chronic stiffness

RANKED PICKS →

- 15–20 min before stretching or activity
- Morning stiffness: heat on waking

## MASSAGE BALL · Glutes, TFL and hip flexors

RANKED PICKS →

- Lie on your side, ball under the hip muscles
- Body weight controls pressure — start light
- Hold trigger points 60–90 seconds
- Standing option: ball against a wall
- Pair with gentle hip stretches when tolerated
- **Electronic massage:** generally not recommended — the hip is hard to reach with one



**WHICH PHASE ARE YOU IN?**

**0–72 hrs:** ice, gentle movement.
**3 days–6 wks:** alternate ice and heat, add massage.
**6+ wks:** heat, massage, fix the setup. Details pg. 3

**EQUIPMENT WE RANKED**

Ice & heat packs →
Massagers & massage balls →

Treat the cause, not just the symptom

Hip tightness tracks with seat height and how long you sit. The assessment sets your seat height and movement plan.

TAKE THE ASSESSMENT

**STOP AND SEE A CLINICIAN**

Numbness or weakness that persists, pain with fever, or symptoms worsening over 24–48 hours.