

Writer's Fatigue

A Guide to the Ailments That Affect Writers of All Ages



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The Health Hazards of Being a Writer... ..

Writing is work — hard, persistent, and sometimes mind-numbing work. It requires input from the mind and the body, because even though you think with your mind, it is your body that must perform the tasks.

A construction worker does strenuous physical work, but he gradually trains his body to do it fluently and develops a good physique. We writers often do exactly the opposite. We strain, not train, through bad posture, improper nutrition, and incorrect ergonomics — all of which result in fatigue and aches and pains.



As a writer, I too have been affected by these maladies. My motto is always MAKE MONEY OUT OF YOUR MISERY. So I wrote WRITER'S FATIGUE and the article made it to the Top Ten in the 2003 EPPIE Nonfiction Category. Many, many writers have read this informational article and send their thanks in an email. I have even had non-writers – IT professionals, accountants – thank me for this article.

Now, why should such a resourceful article just sit in my system? I'm pleased to share it with the rest of my writer friends around the world. You can save it in your system, print it out a copy for yourself or a friend, but before publishing it in your ezine or newsletter, please mail me to talk shop.

Warmly, [Radhika Meganathan](#)

Chautauqua, here I come!

As a recipient of [Highlights Foundation's Fellowship award](#), I'm the [only Indian](#) sponsored to attend the Annual Children's Writer's Conference 2004, to be held in Chautauqua (upstate NY). I'd love to meet fellow writers, so feel free to [mail](#) me!

Dedicated to,

that hardworking writer burning the
midnight oil to meet a deadline.

Many Thanks to..... [Barry's Clip art](#)

This article is a ...



Writer's Fatigue -

A Guide to the Ailments That Affect Writers of All Ages

By Radhika Meganathan

You're writing the climax scene and Captain Cuthbert is about to save the screaming heroine from the pirates. Suddenly, your thought process gets muddled and you turn blank. You know exactly how the climax is going to turn out, but your fingers are uncooperative, your mind refuses to function, you move around like your pet turtle, and there's a shooting pain in your spine and shanks.

Or...

It is 2:02 a.m. You're mad at the cat for having vocal cords. You're mad at the children for sleeping blissfully... and you are mad at yourself for not having enough fingernails to bite.

Finally, giving in to your drooping eyes, you hop into bed for your beauty sleep. Blink, blink. Toss. Turn. After several minutes of number counting and woolgathering, you concede defeat. You cannot sleep.

Or...

You've been waiting for weeks for the Big News, but instead you get another rejection letter. The working-until-all-hours for the past two months, sacrificing sleep, and forgetting about family and food has all been for nothing. You feel defeated, wishing you could forget it all and disappear to some place where there are no word processors or deadlines.



Do any of these situations sound familiar? If so, then it's time to stop writing for a while and start thinking about your health.

After five years of academic and freelance writing, I've realized there are certain maladies that affect almost everyone who writes regularly. As writers, it is our hands and eyes that perform the most important task of transmitting our thoughts into solid words.

Physical ailments like carpal tunnel syndrome, tendonitis, and back strain are common. But while these can cause extreme pain and put you out of the writing business, others like insomnia and depression are no less dangerous and can wreak havoc with your life.

Help For the Hurting Writer

Musculoskeletal back problems are a major cause of disability among writers. Our body was not designed to sit in the same position for prolonged periods of time. The position occupied while using a computer is not good for our backs and can result in muscle pain and spinal problems.

Ergonomic Intelligence is vital to all writers. The best writer's chair is comfortable and adjustable with soft upholstery and an armrest. A wrist pad, footrest, and good desk lamp wouldn't hurt either.



Concentrate on the little details. Sit straight, without slouching. Position your keyboard at elbow height to avoid hunched shoulders and neck pain, and take short walks to relieve stiff muscles and mental stress.

Another problem that many writers suffer from is tired and burning eyes. Staring at a computer screen can lead to a drop in your "blink rate," which causes your eyes to become dry. This, in turn, can lead to blurred vision and headaches and, ultimately, a loss of concentration and efficiency.



To prevent this, keep your computer screen at eye level or slightly higher, never lower. Develop a routine of taking frequent breaks. (Frequent short breaks are better than fewer long ones.)

During a break, it's important to rest your eyes by looking away from the screen. At the same time, you can relieve some of the stress on your body by relaxing your hands, arms, and shoulders.

Alternating tasks whenever possible is also a good way to prevent both eye and musculo-skeletal problems.

The III-Fed Writer

Dyspepsia, heartburn, acid stomach... all of these are frequent visitors to the writer whose preference for food comes only after that of writing. When you work continuously before the computer, it is easy to forget about nutritious food. It's surprising just how many writers maintain an unbalanced, under-nourishing diet.

Most of my writing buddies eat without moving from the computer. They have a bowl next to them and dig into it with the left hand while typing furiously with the right. They have no idea how much they have consumed or indeed, just *what* they have just eaten.

An engine that hasn't been fed the proper petrol never functions well and ultimately breaks down. Similarly, food is the only way to keep your body and, subsequently, your "workability factor" at a high efficiency level.



Start your day by having a wholesome breakfast. A nutritious and balanced diet can do wonders for your metabolism and creativity. Make it a point to have more fibrous foods and less red meat.

Drink 10 glasses of water every day to beat the constipation and dehydration that can result from sedentary work.

Seasonal fruits and salads not only refresh you, but also give you a much-needed break from spicy, cholesterol-laden food, improving your health, complexion, and zest.

Sleep Aids



Are you the type who attacks the computer whenever your muse decides to visit? If so, you may be experiencing sleep difficulties.

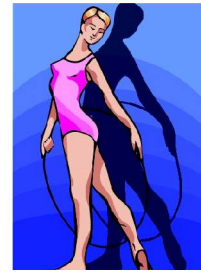
Insomnia is one of the most common ailments that affect the midnight writer, and this can lead to increased stress and lower productivity. The human body is programmed from infancy to work during the day and rest in the night; therefore, changing the body clock drastically can have serious repercussions on mind and body.

This best remedy for this is maintaining a regular schedule. Procrastination is the main culprit for working at wrong times of the day. To avoid this, write down your commitments and deadlines on a paper and post it someplace that you can see it while you're working. This will make you remember your time limit and not put off important tasks.

Learn to work during the day. Yes, it is impossible to predict when you will get that great idea, and many writers have full-time jobs that make writing during the day difficult, but you should still try to work out a schedule that allows you eight full hours of sleep.

Don't overlook the time-tested remedies either. That age-old concoction of warm milk and honey after dinner will grant you a deep sleep, as will a soft, cushiony sleeping surface.

And don't even think of sleeping in your chair, with your feet propped up on the computer table. Just last year, I spent lavish money on medication and physiotherapy after I managed to fall off the chair, hurting my back in the process.



I was also left with a broken UPS (it's mandatory in India, our power supply is not very reliable) and a very irritated parent.

Overcoming Rejection

Rejection and criticism in response to great expectations can lead to feelings of isolation and inferiority. You may even lose the drive or inclination to write out of fear of more rejections.

Sometimes the depression can be so severe that it leads to more serious problems such as alcoholism, violence, and alienation from loved ones. In that case, it is necessary to seek professional counseling.



If you're simply suffering the disheartened feeling that comes with rejection, there are ways to rejuvenate yourself. One way is to read books about writing, subscribe to writing magazines, or take online writing courses.

This will often inspire you to try again. Writers tend to feel unique in their failures. Finding a writing buddy, attending a writers' conference, or joining a writing group allows you to interact with others in the same situation. These are also ways to gain information about new markets and procedures for getting published. As writer Shirley Redmond says, "Cope, don't mope!"

And as somebody who visits the doctor after each hair-wrenching deadline, take my advice. In the long run, health matters. So take time to think about it. A healthy body and mind mean a healthy and active writer.

REFERENCE: WEB SITES & LINKS

Ergonomics

1. <http://www.sfwa.org/ergonomics> — The Science Fiction Writers Association has a page full of valuable information about the need for good ergonomics for writers of all ages.
2. <http://www.healthycomputing.com> — Not only about ergonomics, this site has all the necessary information one should know about healthy computer usage. Don't miss it!

Diet & Nutrition

These sites offer information about nutrition and stress the importance of a good and balanced diet for your whole system:

<http://www.nutriwatch.org>

http://www.nutrifit.org/nutr_info/nuted.html

Depression

These sites deal with writer's depression:

http://www.health-nexus.com/manic-depressive_disorder1.htm

<http://www.speculations.com/depression.htm>



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The format of THE 6-WEEK WRITER email workshop is a fairly standard one; I send you lesson via email, along with weblinks and assignments; you get my feedback every weekend. This workshop is mainly for the fresh writer who has just started writing commercially or has just thought about writing.

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Don't hesitate... Who knows, may be there is a Stephen King or J.K.Rowling in you... enrolling now might be the only chance you can ever get them out of your mind and into the real world. You can also mail me your queries at

writingale@gmail.com

Till then... have a great writing career!

