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What's New in Princeton & Central New Jersey?

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Pain Is Pain, On Keys Or Keyboard

by Scott Morgan

This sentence is 36 characters long. And it was reconfigured, so factor in another 11 or 12. That's almost 50 keystrokes for one short sentence of just six words. Imagine the final tally for this entire article.

When you add up the characters and keystrokes that comprise all that we type in a day — in letters, E-mails, databases, online shopping binges, blogs, and Google searches — the number of times our fingers press down on keyboard keys can be in the tens of thousands.

And that means tens of thousands of chances to develop and aggravate the repetitive motion disorders that have become a modern scourge.

Few are more sympathetic to sufferers of carpal tunnel syndrome or dystonia than Edna Golandsky. And few do more to help. A world-renowned music teacher and founder of the Golandsky Institute, Golandsky holds bachelor's and master's degrees in the subject from Juilliard. She is also an equally renowned consultant and ergonomics guru who has seen the connection between improper movement on the piano and cello and improper movement across the keyboard. Golandsky and her son, Amit Friedlander, have started MoveRight Consulting www.healthytyping.com practice in New York aimed at taking the pain out of typing.



Edna Golandsky

She also will present "Healthy Typing: How To Type Efficiently without Discomfort, Pain or Injury," on Monday, July 13, at 4:30 p.m. at McCormick Hall on the Princeton University campus. Cost: \$20. Call 877-343-3434 for information.

As a teacher of music, Golandsky found that starting people off with good habits is the surest way to keep them from developing what can become truly debilitating injuries. After leaving Juilliard she continued her studies with Dorothy Taubman, who developed a system of posture and proper fingering techniques that did not lead to pain or fatigue. Golandsky quickly developed a reputation for spotting, diagnosing, and preempting trouble, and treating injuries associated with using fingers and wrists.

The Taubman approach. There are three basic principles behind the Taubman approach — alignment, balance, and movement — but they all start with alignment. Natural alignment starts with sitting straight and comfortable, meaning that you should not be stretching, straining, or reaching for anything.

Proper balance refers largely to the weight of the hands and fingers as they contact the keys. Your fingers should be balanced so that when they sit on the keys they don't slide, but also do not compress. Movements should never be enough to disrupt your balance and alignment. Wrists should not be strained or turned.

Common problems. Repetitive movement disorders are not a new problem. In 1717 an Italian physicist began compiling data on what would eventually be called cumulative trauma disorder — a still-underdeveloped and controversial field of research that posits that repeating movements while misaligned can lead to no end of damage in the tissue and joints. Eighteenth century medicine was more focused on larger problems related to farmers and laborers, obviously, as there were no keyboards then. But Golandsky understood early that just because movements are small, there is no guarantee against reaping considerable harm.

Injuries like carpal tunnel syndrome, tendonitis, and dystonia (sustained muscle contractions that can lead to misalignment and pain) have ended promising musical careers and cost jobs

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for people who work primarily on computers. Golandsky says she has witnessed — and, more importantly, helped cure — students who had stopped playing because they had been in too much pain. And her method quickly caught on among the typing set, who began to seek her out with a fervor that made her start MoveRight.

Golandsky says she had considered starting a formal business in proper typing technique for years and had helped numerous clients. She just did not have the needed urge to be a businesswoman. "I had been very successful in music but I thought this would be expensive," she says. Her son, however, recently graduated from Wharton Business School at Penn and finally "got sick and tired of hearing about" his mother's idea. Friedlander helped set her up and get to work. She had long foreseen the potential client base — "Everyone I know has problems," she says.

Coming problems. The future might also hold a whole new generation of clients suffering from an emerging ailment dubbed "BlackBerry thumb." As texting takes over as the preferred method of written communication among the young the problems associated with the movements of the fingers are going to increase, Golandsky says. The issue is strongly related to afflictions like carpal tunnel syndrome in that such injuries occur from sustained periods of curling and straining the digits while pressing on keys. Texting's requisite bent thumbs are putting Generation Y on a crash course to expensive (and often useless) surgeries or pain killers that do not actually stop the problem, she says.

Golandsky makes no effort to hide how she feels about the problems she sees. "It really is a global healthcare crisis," she says. "It has been for years. But you don't need a knife and you don't need a pill. You need proper technique."

Golandsky began her work in the field in the 1970s when she was working with Dorothy Taubman. In 1976 she conceived the idea of establishing an institute where people could come together during the summer and pursue an intensive investigation of the Taubman method and encouraged Taubman to establish the Taubman Institute. The two ran the institute together, Taubman as executive director and Golandsky as artistic director.

Almost from the beginning Taubman entrusted Golandsky with the planning and programming of the annual summer session, and Golandsky gave daily lectures on the Taubman Approach and later conducted master classes as well.

She struck out on her own, founding the Golandsky Institute in 2003, and remaining devoted to the Taubman method. She has been a featured speaker at many music medicine conferences and is also an adjunct professor of piano at CUNY. The institute appears in Princeton Sunday, June 12, through Saturday, June 18.

"Life is movement," Golandsky says. "But you have to move correctly. the problems are easily corrected. What you do right settles into the brain."

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