

Computer Safety of a Different Kind

By Suze Hargraves

If you dare, look at the wires connected to your computer. Most likely, it's not a pretty sight. Where do the cords run? (*Please tell me none of them is running under a carpet! Can you say "fire hazard"?*) I bet there is at least one cord that is in the path of you getting to something else you need. I once tripped over a cord in my old office, sprained my ankle, broke two monitors and took out a small server. The cord was lying innocently in a corner that was never used until that day I needed to get to the dusty old cabinet being guarded by the seemingly innocent cord. Was it the cords fault? No of course not. It was my fault for A. Not watching where I was going and B. Not securing the cord or the equipment properly.

The Center for Injury Research and Policy of the Research Institute at Nationwide Children's Hospital reports careless placement of computer equipment and wiring will be responsible an estimated 9,300 injuries in the U.S. in 2009. We're talking about head injuries, broken bones, sprains and other physical injuries not caused by actual use of the computer. Children under 5 are most likely to fall victim to this sort of injury, but are more likely to suffer serious consequences such as head injuries. Improperly placed equipment can result in someone leaning on or grabbing a table edge and having a printer land on their hand, head or foot. A child just learning to walk will use just about anything within reach to pull themselves up. A non-wireless keyboard left in reach of curious toddlers is an invitation to pull and potentially get more then they bargained for.

Children are not the only ones who fall victim to computer related accidents. I know several people who've had close calls with pets and these types of accidents. An example of this is my friend's cat who was innocently rubbing herself up against an open laptop left on a small folding table. Kitty rubbed against a laptop teetering on the unstable table. The table fell and so did the laptop which landed on kitty fracturing her leg. If their two year old had been in the vicinity things could have been even worse. The accident served as a wakeup call for the family who previously thought nothing of leaving unsecured laptops lying around on counters, desks and tables where both little hands and little paws can find themselves in danger.

Securing the wires to your computer is the first step to preventing computer related accidents. Use plastic ties to secure wires or go wireless when possible. Wires that need to run along floors should be secured against walls using clips for that purpose. Try to keep your desk facing a wall so wires are neatly secured and out of reaching distance for little hands. Pet proofing wires requires little more than a trip to a local hardware store to buy one of the many types of cheap piping available. You can run multiple cords through the piping to chew proof as much of the cord as possible.

Work surfaces should be big and sturdy enough to accommodate the needed computer equipment. If something looks or feels wobbly, fix it or replace it. Don't use portable tables for work surfaces around small children or pets. If you're using a non-wireless laptop somewhere other than a designated work area, try to keep any cords as out of the way as possible. Don't get so absorbed in your work that you forget to warn a loved one that a printer cable is snaking across the floor. A fall for anyone in your home can have much more serious results than you might anticipate.

Keeping your home safe is part of staying healthy. Your computer can give you access to a world of information on diet, exercise and general health topics, but you've got to remember that it needs to be treated with the same respect and caution as you would treat any household appliance. For complete information about home safety, visit www.cdc.gov or www.kidshealth.org.

Stay healthy; stay safe.

Suze Hargraves is a staff member and writer for White Mountain Community Health Center, a non-profit health care provider serving the Mount Washington Valley. Call (603) 447-8900, Ext. 1, for an appointment or information.