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An irrational fear of mice can send even the bravest among us up onto a kitchen chair, squealing. Most people are far less afraid of the breed of rodent known as a computer mouse, but that one, too, can cause problems. Clicking and selecting and deleting all day every day can lead to discomfort and even outright pain in shoulders and arms. Too much of anything is dangerous, and mousing, it seems, is no exception. Fortunately, every problem has a solution. A co-worker told me she tried putting the mouse on the other side of the keyboard, essentially driving on the opposite side of the road. This is one way to solve the problem, but not a very good way. A righthanded person who is accustomed to having the mouse on the right quickly realizes that operating the mouse wrong-handedly is only part of the picture. The other aspect involves asking the other hand to behave differently as well. Learning new tricks takes time and practice and that means time away from the work at hand: clicking and selecting and deleting.

Fortunately, most problems have multiple solutions. In this case, the better resolution is also a shortcut. Microsoft calls them that: Shortcuts. My co-worker calls them Magic. These are keystroke combinations that take you around the screen and help you operate without reaching to your right every time you need to do something new. Work can be done in less time, and arms and shoulders are better off than ever. Sorry, mouse.

We all know a few shortcuts and tend to use the handful we're familiar with. What people don't realize is that commonly used Office programs contain literally hundreds of built-in commands. A person resolving to learn one a day could keep busy through next summer adding shortcuts to his memory and improving his effectiveness at the computer. Cheat sheets available online list all the available keyboard shortcuts for many programs. An easy way to learn them is to take it slow. Write one or two on sticky notes and place them in front the computer. When those become habit, add a couple more.

Here are some shortcuts to try:

Checking email in Outlook? To get to the mailbox, hold down the CTRL key and press 1. Maybe you've been invited to a party. To reply to an email, hold down CTRL again and press R. R for Reply. Tell your friend you'll be there, can't wait. To schedule the party in your calendar, hold down CTRL and press 2 to get to the calendar, and then CTRL + N to start a New appointment.

Someone who spends time in MS Word can use the control key to do almost anything. CTRL + O will Open a file. CTRL + N creates a New document. CTRL + S, of course, will Save it. And CTRL + W will Wrap it up, closing the file.

Switching occasionally between keyboard and mouse a good idea. Keyboarding alone can be as harmful as overdoing it with the mouse. The key is in striking a good balance, and keyboard shortcuts can help.

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