Author's response to reviews

Title: Carpal tunnel syndrome and the use of computer mouse and keyboard A systematic review

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Author's response to reviews:

Reviewer: Arianne Verhagen

General comments:

1. We do see the reviewer’s point but we find that the wording in the criteria takes into account that only strong epidemiological studies (as RCT and large prospective studies) may provide sufficient evidence for a causal association. Actually, the wording of the criteria used here (and in several recent reviews as referenced in the article) is inspired by the criteria used by the International Agency on Cancer Research (IARC, Lyon. See e.g. supplementum 7 (1987) and also the Preamble to the Monographs (2006)).

Specific comments:

1. We have now updated the research to August 2008 regarding the epidemiological studies on CTS and computer work. Accordingly, changes have been made in the text regarding numbers of included studies and description of the added study in the results and discussion sections and in the Table.

2. The reviewer refers to the Quorum statement. We have used the Quorum check list and included all relevant parameters (such as study design, potential confounders, bias, sample size, power, follow-up period). The check list is aimed at RCTs. Therefore not all parameters were relevant.

   We have added information about blinding, as suggested.

3. We find that it is widely agreed that objective measures in the evaluation of biomechanical strain put on the body is clearly better than self report. This is because 1) the risk of reporting bias, i.e. if you have symptoms then you have a tendency to over-report exposure 2) it is difficult to assess an ergonomic
exposure, e.g. in one of the reviewed studies (Andersen JH et al 2003) number of hours of computer work was asked. At the same time, a computer programme was installed in the participant’s computer recording all computer use. It turned out that the self report exaggerated the time using the computer by a factor 5-10 most noticeable for low exposure (Mikkelsen S et al. Occup Envir Med 2007;64 (8):541-7)

4.
We have now further shortened this section leaving out details also mentioned in the Table.

5.
We find that the quality assessment is quite thoroughly presented in the description of the studies in the results section with weight put on the parameters mentioned in the method section.
We have now moved the evidence synthesis to the results section at the end of the relevant paragraphs.

6.
We have added a paragraph about publication bias.

Comments to Poul Frost
We have now changed the wording in the sentence to “a limited number” as it is not quite clear if the results of the papers that the reviewer mentions actually are used in the context of evaluating the risk of computer work. Their results seem to be used in evaluating other biomechanical exposure.

Comments to Andrew Moore
We have now, according to the reviewer 1, used the check list from the Quorum statement which is a more updated list compared to the Bradford Hill criteria.
As described above (reviewer 1, first specific comment) we have updated the search and included the Atroshi study.