

Our Irreplaceable Tools

Many stitchers have a favorite gadget or tool that we wouldn't do without. Whether it is a laying tool, magnet, or needle threader, we take care to use it, store it, and maintain it correctly. But have you ever given the same thought and attention to the most irreplaceable tools you have?

Eyes: Poor lighting, eye strain, and decreased sight impact how well we stitch. Your light should come over your shoulder on the opposite side from your dominant hand. Avoid harsh lighting and lights shining directly into your eyes. Use appropriate magnification for your vision, whether they are free standing, clipped to your stretcher bars or clamped to your work surface, or work as glasses or attachments to your lenses. Experiment with different style of lighting and magnification to see which combinations work best for you. At the very least, take an occasional short break from your work. Lift your head and look across the room, or step outside or to a window and focus on a distant object for a few minutes to avoid eye strain.

Posture: Sometimes it is easy to loose track of time as we are bent over our project and don't realize how stiff we have become until we try to stand up. Experiment with your work area so that you are comfortable and not putting undue stress and tension on your body. You may prefer working at a table with a straight backed chair or sitting in a recliner with your project on your lap. Remember to get up and move around from time to time. Holding your head in one position for a long time can cause stress and pain in your neck and shoulders. Try standing and gently moving your head; turn as far as you comfortably can in different directions: up, down, and side-to-side. Gently shrug your shoulders and rotate them forward and backward to release any stress.

Hands and fingers: Pay attention to your grip and the amount of pressure you need to pull your needle and thread. Use a needle puller or small pair of pliers to help pull threads through multiple layers. Watch the grip and pressure you use when holding stretcher bars or other frames. Give your hands a rest by gently bending and flexing your fingers and your wrists. A small "stress ball" kept in your stitching basket is good for this purpose.

By paying attention to a few details, we can keep our stitching time enjoyable and productive. Whether from misuse, overuse, or just plain age, these tools are our most important and cannot be replaced. Keep them in good condition and enjoy your stitching hobby for a long time to come!

IMPORTANT: This column provides some very simple and gentle movements which should be appropriate for most individuals; however, it is not intended as medical advise and should not be considered as a replacement for a doctor's care. Before starting any exercise program, consult with your physician or a licensed physical therapist for exercises appropriate to your individual situation.