

Two Steps to Fix Your Neck Pain

Mom was Right!

“Stand up straight!” and “Stop hunching!”... I cannot tell you how many times I heard my mother tell me that as I was growing up. Unfortunately, this is another thing I have to admit my mother was right about.



Good posture makes us look taller, confident and more attractive – and so mother had good reason to be on my case. But good posture is also important for good health.

Proper posture means our muscles, joints, ligaments and nerves are able to function as they should – and without interference. Sure, we’re meant to be flexible – but being crooked, bent or just hunched over leaves us working against our optimal design.

Your Head is a Bowling Ball

One of the most common causes of poor posture today is a forward head posture. Our daily activities – computers, TV’s, video games, office work, driving the car – all contribute to us putting our head forward and can bring on pain in our neck, shoulders, or even headaches.

Now think of your head as a 12-15 pound bowling ball. Kind of heavy, isn’t it?

Imagine holding that bowling ball out from the top of your body just an inch or two. It might be easy to hold it right on top of your shoulders, but moving it out just a little bit becomes quite a lot of work and the bowling ball gets heavy real soon, doesn’t it?

The ideal position for your head is therefore a “no-brainer”– it should be right over the top of your neck and shoulders...And if we hold our heads forward even one inch in front of its normal position, our neck has to work much, much harder to hold it there (think of the bowling ball).

Prolonged strain and pressure on your neck is bad as a severe automobile accident. As a doctor, I have seen this in patient after patient. The discs in the upper part of the spine can become herniated from the abnormal pressure and positioning. The muscles in the front of the neck are overworked and shortened while those in the back of your neck is stretched and strained.

It’s bad news... but easily avoided.

Let me tell you the secret...

It’s about YOU

In order to eliminate the neck, shoulder or upper back pain the first step is an evaluation of your situation. Even the best “expert advice” or training regimen is useless if it does not address the specifics of your situation. And each one of us is different – right?

So before you start doing any exercises, buy that special chair, back support or whatever – before you spend any money on resolving your problem – get a professional assessment of your situation. Chiropractors are specially-trained in diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mechanical disorders of the musculoskeletal system – a fancy way of saying that we know a thing or two about posture.

So get with a Chiropractor that knows his/her stuff to check your posture. That's STEP ONE.

Most People Can't Pass the "Wall Test" - Can You??

Try this simple test to see if you need to correct poor posture. Stand with your back about 6 inches from the wall. Now back up until some part of you first touches the wall. Check off which part touches first:

- Head Shoulders Derriere Heels

If you were not able to check all four of boxes – meaning that all four of those body parts touched the wall at the same time – then you flunked the test.

By the way, it's easy to pass the test – all that's needed is to stretch/strengthen the muscles that are not doing their job.

For example, if your shoulders did not touch first (i.e., they are rounded and slumped forward) then you need to work on stretching out your pectoral (chest) muscles.

- Stand in a doorway and hold one arm up, with your elbow against the door frame.
- Slowly step forward while keeping your elbow braced by the door frame.

Or if your head did not touch first, you can lengthen the muscles in the front portion of your neck and strengthen the muscles in the back of your neck with the chin tuck.

- While sitting or standing straight up, use your neck to pull your chin straight back
- Hold for 5-15 seconds and return to the starting position.

Doing the right exercises to correct your posture is STEP TWO of the solution.

Two-Step Complications...?

The two steps outlined above are the best way to eliminating neck pain for most people. However, if you've been into bad posture for a long time, additional treatment may be necessary to eliminate the scar tissue built up over the years.

Unfortunately, the body has no natural way to dispose of scar tissue – so you cannot exercise it away. Various techniques have been developed to remove scar tissue from inside your body. Both the Active Release Techniques® and Graston Technique® have proven very effective at scar tissue removal.

So... if your posture has been bad since your mother was nagging you about it, be sure to seek a certified provider in these techniques that can help you both correct your posture and remove the scar tissue.

Now sit up straight, eat well, get enough sleep and go see your Chiropractor for an evaluation and instruction in the exercises you need. You'll be glad you did!

Dr Alice