

Health & Fitness

Neck pain? Simple shrug should help

By PATRICK R. SMITH, D.C.

In my practice, I am observing more and more frequently patients with chronic neck, shoulder and upper back pain and stiffness.

A recent survey by the American Chiropractic Association supports my observation. These patients share a common yet very preventable problem – poor upper body posture.

We all have seen someone sitting hunched over a computer, typing away for hours on end. This and many other types of flexed seated positions, repeated day after day, cause poor or incorrect upper body posture.

For correct upper body posture while sitting, the relationship or alignment of the hips, shoulders and head should be in a vertical axis. In plain English, this means that your ears, shoulders and hip joints should all line up from top to bottom while you are sitting.

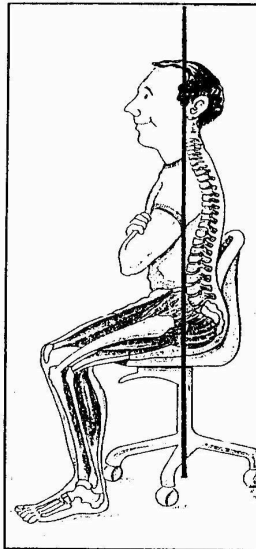
If you are reading while sitting, maintain a neutral seated posture: your head should be squarely over your shoulders so that your ears and shoulders line up, and your shoulders should be squarely over your pelvis so that your shoulder joints and hip joints line up.

This neutral posture places the

least amount of stress upon the muscles, tendons, ligaments and spinal joints that support your upper body.

Just reflect on how much you sit during the day with your upper body flexed forward while you perform a variety of activities. Done on a daily basis, this causes repetitive stress to your body. Left unchecked, repetitive stress leads to muscle strain, spasm, poor posture, ligament stress, vertebral misalignment and eventually can lead to chronic neck, shoulder and upper back pain with stiffness. Sound familiar?

Here's a simple exercise to try. It's



Don't hunch

called a Therapeutic Shoulder Shrug. The purpose of this exercise is to undo the effect of sitting in a flexed position. It gently stretches postural muscles, restores neutral upper body posture and reduces stress to the neck, shoulders and upper back. For this exercise, follow the steps below:

- Assume a neutral seated posture.
- Take a deep breath and hold it.
- Lift or shrug your shoulders straight up towards your ears and hold.
- While holding your breath and maintaining your shoulders up, pull your shoulders back

and hold for eight to 10 seconds.

- Release by exhaling, bringing your shoulders forward and lowering your shoulders to neutral posture.

- Repeat steps one to five for five repetitions.

- Do this two to three times a day.

Try it. All you have to lose is your neck, shoulder and upper back stress. What you may gain is less pain, less stiffness and improved posture. If you are experiencing persistent pain or discomfort, you should seek comprehensive and individualized chiropractic care.