

Postural neck Problems

Our guide to neck posture and how you can help yourself to improve it.

We see many patients in our clinics complaining of symptoms commonly associated with the neck.

The reasons for neck problems range from injury, such as whiplash, joint disease such as rheumatoid or osteo-arthritis to postural problems.

We rarely see our patients in the clinic before the postural problem has arisen and caused symptoms. A good assessment of the problem usually gives some pointers as to the reason for the symptoms, the structures causing them and generally a few clues as to how to treat it. We have to decide, by analysing the symptoms and the structures involved with the symptomatic movements, which tissues are involved and the best way to treat them. This may involve stretching, strengthening or improving the quality of movement usually with manual techniques.



Once we have sorted the problem out, we use education and often a few specific exercises to try and prevent the problem from reoccurring. If I could try and explain these problems to you now you may be able to help yourself and avoid the pitfalls of poor posture.

www.bevanwilson.co.uk
01483 424505



BEVAN WILSON

Physiotherapy & Sport Injuries Clinics

Postural problems related to the neck Upper neck and head

Problems leading to symptoms into the head and face usually stem from the upper part of the neck; these could include headaches, jaw pain, ear pain, even a runny nose! – To name but a few. In particular, the joints affected are those joining the skull to the neck and a couple of joints below. They become stiff and/or painful, typically due to a posture known as the 'poking chin'. You can imagine it by straining your head forward as if trying to see a computer screen. The joints get squashed at the back and eventually get sore and inflamed. If you are in this position often enough, especially for long hours, the soft tissues rarely get a stretch and consequently shorten making it even less likely that the joints will get relief from this position. They are then described as stiff.

In addition to the joint and soft tissue pain, you may be unlucky enough to suffer from nerve pain. Generally this is more severe. Nerve pain occurs due to pressure on the nerve which restricts its circulation and can cause reversible and occasionally irreversible damage. The symptoms may also include weakness, numbness and pins and needles from this altered circulation. The pressure can be caused from swelling (e.g. such as that from an inflamed joint), from tight soft tissues or sometimes from a bony out-growth. The aims of our treatments would be to try and reduce this pressure by stretching soft tissue, reducing the swelling and of course encouraging a more joint friendly posture.



Lower neck and upper back problems

Problems leading to symptoms in the lower neck, shoulders and arms (pain, weakness, numbness and pins and needles) stem from the lower part of the neck and also the upper back. This is because the nerves from these areas supply the arms. As before, posture plays a major role and a poor sitting position could cause the Dowager's hump, which is an excessive curve forward at the junction of your back and neck.



The symptoms may be local to the neck itself, these are due to the soft tissues at the junction of the neck and back being over stretched and it aches because of the constant stretch on the ligaments between the joints. Try bending a finger back and holding it there for 20-30 seconds, that's ligamentous pain. Often the pain may be higher than the problem because the dowager's hump becomes stiff and it becomes difficult to bend back from that area. Consequently, in order to look up, the middle part of your neck moves excessively and repeatedly and can inflame the joints. In addition, this area is also home to the first ribs of the rib cage and some of the muscles of your neck attach to them. If your neck is painful and the muscles tighten up these muscles pull the ribs up and irritate the joints and can also squash the nerves which run between them. Inflammation may then be enough to cause pressure on the nerve along with the resulting nerve symptoms.

The nerves need to glide up and down your arms as you move them over your keyboard, or use your knitting needles, closing the spaces that they move through means that they may have difficulty gliding. Your restricted habitual posture (e.g. long periods of time at a computer or driving a car), could mean the nerves never move through their full range and are constantly under some pressure, causing the restriction to the circulation not necessarily a lot of pressure but, for some considerable time. This is one mechanism put forward for repetitive strain injury.

Correcting your posture and preventing neck problems

Sitting posture

It used to be said that we were not designed to stand on 2 legs. In fact we are, but we are certainly not designed to sit, especially for the long hours we tend to these days, at computers. To gain control for such a long period of time we have to rely on the furniture we use.



A good neck posture very much depends on the position of your pelvis/lower back. It should be held in a neutral position (neither too bent, nor too straight) and encouraged to stay there by having a support in your lower back and arranging your chair and desk so that your elbows are at the same height as your desk.

Ideally have your monitor at eye level or just below if you need to look at your keyboard to type. Keep the space under your desk clear so that you can move your chair into that space and use the back support. By keeping your lower back in this position it moves your spine into an 'S' shape when all the joints are close to their neutral position and therefore there is minimal strain on your joints, soft tissues and muscles.

Movement

The last thing to remember is that your body is designed to move. If you want to take the pressure off the joints, nerves and soft tissues the easiest way is to move. Walking and swimming would be my preferred methods, but even walking to the kettle and a quick stretch up to the cupboard for the coffee will move the nerves through the tissues so what are you waiting for?

For more information or advice regarding neck posture or any other musculo-skeletal or rehabilitation problem please feel free to contact one of our Chartered Physiotherapists :

www.bevanwilson.co.uk

info@bevanwilson.co.uk

01483 424505