



OPTIMUM PERFORMANCE THROUGH MOVEMENT
Providing education and physical rehabilitation services since 1990
www.optmtherapy.com

YOUR NECK BOOK

Self care for your neck pain

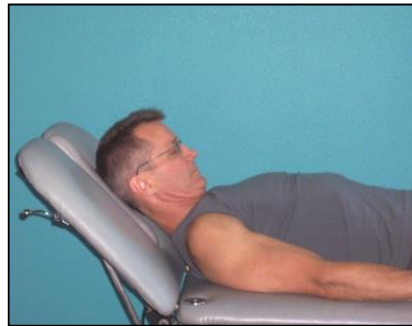
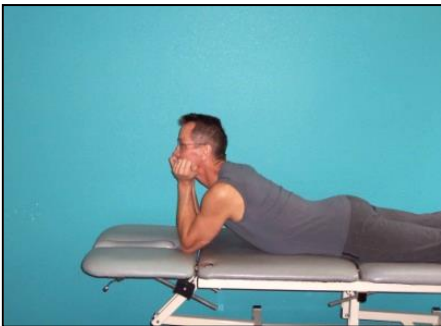
Your homework:

- 1.**
- 2.**
- 3.**
- 4.**

Neck and shoulder pain is prevalent in today's world. The good news is that most people recover from painful episodes. Pain may be produced by poorly conditioned bodies, poor posture and body mechanics and various psycho-social issues. Therefore, there is much we can do to reduce the experience of neck and/or shoulder pain. We also need to be aware of the health of our nervous system and **think positive thoughts** about our recovery.

Your entire spine and shoulders are a functional unit, making it important to consider all of these areas together when you have a problem in any area. The following are suggestions for self-care, whether it be of an acute or chronic nature or related to surgical treatment. Pay attention to what motions and positions aggravate your symptoms. It is most helpful to avoid them!

Avoid these!



Your shoulders, neck and upper back work together as a unit. What affects one area affects the other areas. Pay attention to the position of your entire body, not just your neck. Movements of your arms cause contractions of your neck muscles. The farther you move your elbows away from your body, the more stress there is on your neck. To minimize neck stress, **keep your arms close to your body**.

Generally, having your head turned toward the side of pain will provoke your pain. Position yourself so that reading, watching TV, using your computer or having a conversation are performed with your head turned slightly away from the pain. **Avoid cradling the phone between your ear and shoulder.**

Don't become your medical diagnosis! Your well-being may not be directly related to abnormal anatomy. Many people have abnormal findings on imaging and have no symptoms. As your symptoms subside, corresponding anatomical changes probably will not occur. Pay attention to the activities which aggravate and relieve your symptoms and how you think about your pain, not your diagnosis. **We can alter your health and comfort and you will get better!**

A Healthy Life:

Good posture is good for our body. Our body parts all work together. When attempting to do something healthy for one part, we should ensure that what we are doing is healthy for our whole body. The healthier you are in general, the more resilient you will be when you are ill or injured. You will improve your stress tolerance and your recovery from painful episodes will be enhanced. Your general health and emotional well-being are essential to your recovery. **Recovery is not a light switch, it is more of a rheostat.** You improve a little at a time.

Every day you need to remind yourself to do good things for yourself: eat the right portions of good food, get plenty of sleep (your body needs energy to recover, so don't cheat on your sleep. Get at least 7-8 hours every night) and think positive thoughts. You will recover, but it is a journey.

Healthy Advice:

1. Modify your postures and activities to keep your spine healthy.
2. Change positions frequently and minimize sitting to avoid static stress to your spinal tissues.
3. Move daily. Include walking and a few exercises as instructed, to keep your body strong and limber. If standing is comfortable, try standing at least 60% of your day.
4. Unload your spine by elongating it like a spring.
5. Eat a healthy diet and maintain a healthy weight.
6. Get 7-8 hours of sleep daily.
7. Improve your health with positive thoughts and meditation. Use your exercise time to clear your mind and enhance your immune system.

Sitting: the proper position will make a big difference in your comfort and protect your spine. Fortunately, the same positions which are good for your low back are also good for your neck. Your arms are slung from your neck by muscles. Providing good arm support allows your neck to relax. Using arm rests and is helpful while resting. Make sure you have good lumbar support to **avoid slumped sitting**, which stresses the neck area by abnormally changing the normal curves of the spine. When driving, make the back rest of the seat reclined 15-20 degrees and try to provide arm support.

- a. **AVOID SLUMP SITTING:** Use a pillow or towel to support your spine. Perched sitting, with your hips to the edge of the chair and higher than your knees and your feet under you is a convenient method of supporting yourself.

It isn't about being vertical but rather avoiding the slumped, flexed spine position. Control your spine position by controlling your pelvis position. Find your pelvic position which straightens your spine and is most comfortably supported. Healthy positions for our low back are also healthy for our neck and shoulders.

- b. Periods of sitting > 30-60 minutes are stressful for you even in the best of chairs or positions. You need to get up to move every 30 minutes to vary the stresses on your body. One position may be more comfortable than others, but remaining static in that one position is not optimal.
- c. If you sit for many hours each day, get up every 30-60 minutes for 1 minute. Stretch your arms up to the ceiling, squat down and up, take some deep breaths and walk around.
- d. You need to walk and move around for 5-10 minutes prior to beginning physical work if you have been sitting for more than 30 minutes.
- e. **Recliner:** Keep your back supported: **Sitting in bed to read or watch TV is generally not a good position for your back or neck. We prefer that you avoid this.**
- f. **Car seat:** tilt the front of the seat downward so that the front is lower than the rear portion of the seat. Avoid bucket or soft seats. A **Sacro-Ease** car seat insert may be beneficial. Recline the back about 20 degrees.
- g. **Couch:** Place pillows behind your back for support and under your pelvis to prevent sinking into the couch. If you are sitting up, avoid having your legs straight out or dangling freely. Your feet need to be in contact with the floor or a support stool. Support your arms and try turning your head slightly away from the painful side.

Sitting



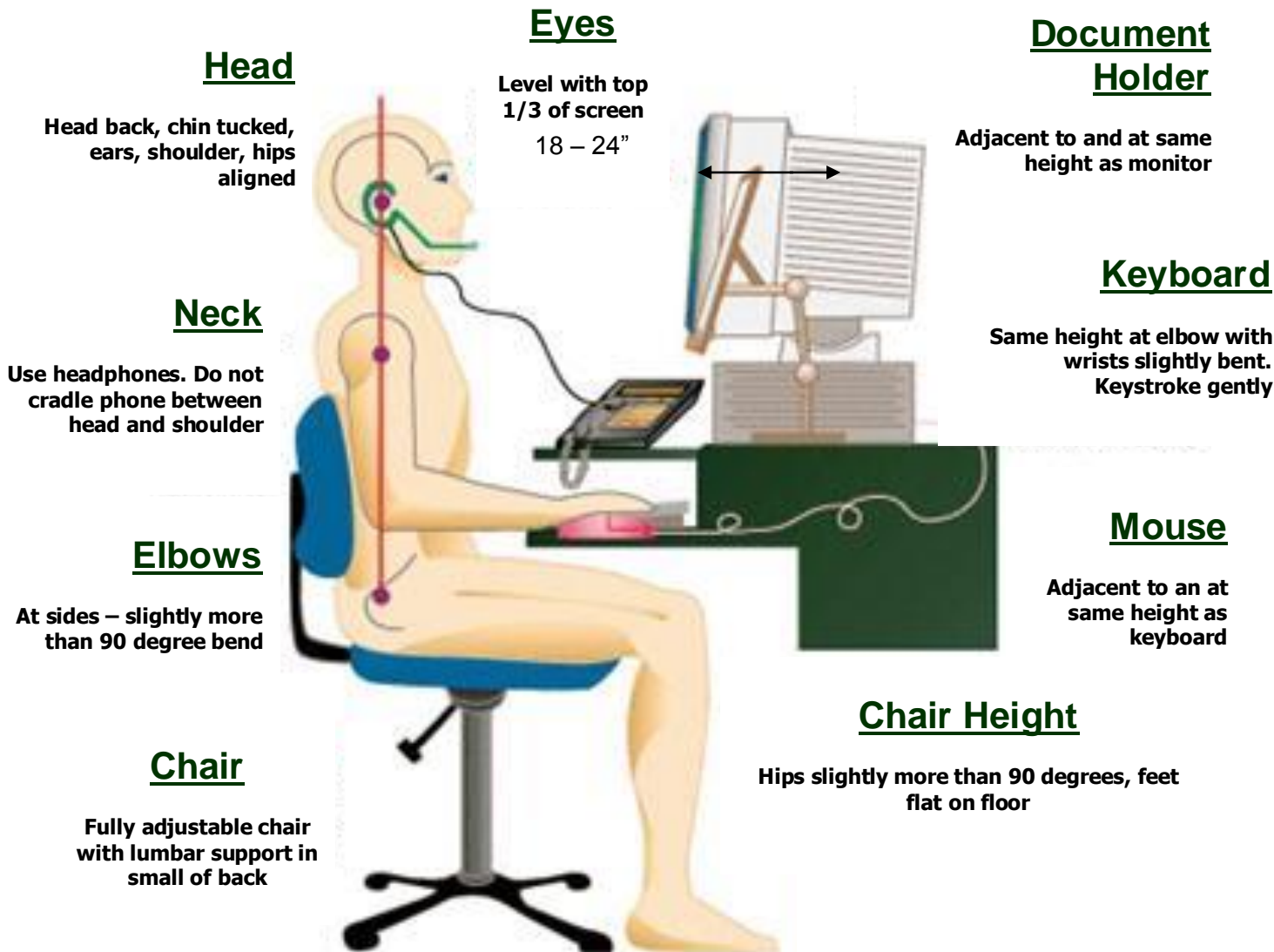
Slumped posture



Office chair
note arm and back support

Carrying: carry objects at waist level and close to your body. Try to balance your loads and keep it close to your body. Divide the load in half and carry a portion in each hand or carry the entire load in front of your body.

Vision: poor eyesight or inappropriate glasses can cause us to protrude our head to improve our vision. Check to ensure that your glasses are right for reading and using the computer. You may need glasses specific for computer use.



**Take breaks
every
30 minutes**

Computer Use

Posture

- When viewing the computer screen, make sure your head is tilted slightly downward looking directly forward
- Your shoulders and arms should be in a relaxed position by your side.
- Your elbows should be bent at a 90 degree angle when you use the keyboard.

Keyboard/Pointing Device

- The home row keys should be positioned directly in the center of the trunk of your body.
- The keyboard height and slope should be easily adjusted.
- The pointing device (mouse) should be within close reach and at the same level as the keyboard.

Chair

- The chair height should be adjusted so feet are flat on the floor.
 - Can use a stool to support your feet if chair will not lower enough for you
- Hips should be as far back in the chair as possible.
- The chair back should support the back from seat to shoulder blades.
- The chair backrest height should be adjusted to provide maximum support.
- Seats should be long and wide enough to support the hips and thighs.
- The chair should have armrests so your arms can rest comfortably.

Computer Screen

- The top of the screen should be slightly below eye-level.
- The screen should be at the proper tilt and height so you can view it without raising or lowering your chin.
 - If you wear glasses or bifocal lenses, the screen should be at an appropriate height for viewing without raising or lowering your chin
- The screen should be approximately an arm's reach from you.
- Documents should be placed on stands beside the monitor.
 - Avoid _____ rotation as specified by your therapist.

Laptop or Tablet

- All of the same ergonomic principles should be applied when using a laptop or tablet.
- Avoid working with laptop or tablet in your lap.
- May want to use a separate keyboard to achieve appropriate monitor and keyboard heights.

For further ergonomic info, please visit our website at www.optmtherapy.com

Posture and Relaxation

Modify activities that cause sustained looking up or protruding your chin or downward. This activity can be made more comfortable by tilting the book up and resting it and your arms on a pillow, and by taking frequent movement breaks. Let your head be balanced on your neck. Avoid clenching of the teeth and gum chewing as these will also tighten the neck muscles.

Movement: Static postures will likely be uncomfortable. Generally, activity such as walking or specific neck and shoulder movements are suggested.

Arm Support: Sitting with the arms supported can greatly reduce stress to the upper traps and to the cervical spine. Ideally, your arms should be supported at 90 degrees.



Driving

When driving, hold steering wheel with arms by your side with your back fully supported on seat back. After achieving good sitting posture in your seat, adjust your mirrors. This can serve as a reminder to correct your posture when you start to slouch.



Sleeping:

A "one size fits all" pillow may not fit you. Generally, a soft pillow that you can shape to fit the space between your neck and shoulder will be best. A small towel, rolled to fill this area may also help (see below). Additional pillows to support the arm(s) may also provide relief. It is not uncommon to find rest in a reclining position to be more comfortable than lying flat.

Avoid sleeping face down.



Side sleepers should make sure pillow is thick enough to prevent the head from bending down toward the bed or too big and push the head upward



Back sleepers should avoid pillows which put the neck into too much flexion or extension



Avoid sleeping with head in extended position



Try tilting head and pillow slightly forward, so that pillow is slightly angled compared to the body

Beds: The sleeping system includes the mattress and the pillows and how they work together. A somewhat firm mattress is generally preferred over a soft mattress. Sleep in different beds in your home to determine if one is more comfortable. When choosing a mattress, please be aware that the soft ones always feel better in the short period of time you have to test them in the store, but may not be the best for you. A supportive bed which is softer where your bones are most prominent, e.g. shoulders and hips would be ideal. European Sleep Works, www.sleepworks.com, (which is a good website regarding sleep issues.) does make this type of bed system.

If your neck or back pain is worse in the morning and better when you move, then your sleep system, or your position during the night is not right for you.

Pillows should be used to support and position your body for maximal comfort. Generally, for your neck, if you have a firm mattress, you need a slightly larger pillow. This may depend on your sleeping position. **Be careful, most people use a pillow which is too big for them.** You want to support your neck but not force it into uncomfortable positions. Avoid propping your head up when you are lying down.

If you have neck pain, the type of pillow which may be helpful for you may change as your neck pain changes. One that supports your neck curve may be helpful when your neck is sore, but it may become uncomfortable when your neck pain improves. **Avoid sleeping face down.**

Traction

Unloading your spine eases the pain and allows for healing to occur more rapidly. Traction can be performed in different ways; using your hands, with a towel and rope over the doorknob, or with a purchased unit.

Position yourself in the most comfortable position or as instructed by your PT in _____ side bend and _____ rotation. Remain there for _____ minutes, _____ times per day. ***If symptoms increase, stop traction and tell your therapist at your next appointment.***



Controlling your pain

Heat or Ice: Generally ice is best to help acute pain, using it about 15 minutes at a time as often as necessary. Make sure to put a thin towel between you and the ice. Heat is often helpful for muscle tightness and pain, done either with a warm shower or a heating pad. Avoid keeping the heat on for more than about 20 minutes, and do not sleep with the heat. Avoid letting your neck get chilled in cold weather.

Medication: Use prescribed medication as instructed by your physician. If you are relying on "over the counter" medication, avoid aspirin with a traumatic injury, and instead use Tylenol. Use as directed.

Cervical Collar: This will often help with acute pain, but you must make sure the collar does not cause you to look up or to push your head forward.



BREATHING AWARENESS

How you breathe can contribute to your neck pain. There are three main areas of the body that are responsible for breathing:

Your diaphragm: This is the main breathing muscle, When you use it to breathe your belly expands

- If you only use your belly to breathe, you may develop restricted chest movement and not maintain the necessary movement of your ribs and thoracic spine, which in turn will place stress on your neck. You need to learn how to use your chest while breathing.

Your chest: Your ribs and thoracic spine move and your chest expands and relaxes

Your neck: These muscles are accessory muscles and should be minimally active unless you are breathing very hard. The muscles attach to the neck and help elevate the ribs

- If you typically use your neck for breathing, the muscles, which elevate the ribs, will stress your neck with their action. You need to use your belly and chest more to decrease neck stress.

Technique:

Sitting, relax your neck and shoulders. Place one hand on your belly and one on your chest. Feel where the movement is occurring. Now, alter the pattern and consciously direct it to the proper areas as instructed by your therapist.

Training the deep flexor muscles of the front of your neck

These muscles are weakened with head forward postures, whiplash type injuries and sometimes they are just weak and don't control neck motion very well. These exercises combined with better posture will strengthen these muscles and improve your comfort.

Hold each contraction for _____ seconds and _____ repetitions _____ times daily

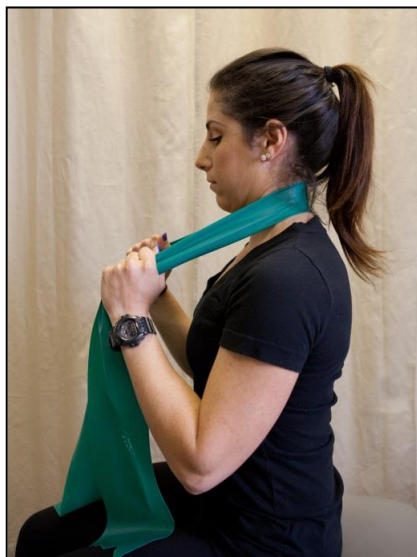
Progress to _____ seconds every _____ days up to 30 second contractions. The goal is to perform 3 minutes of these exercises daily (6 x 30 seconds.)

Generally, you may feel about a 4/10 pain, which is ok. If you are feeling the muscles in the back of your neck, then you are tilting your head upward instead of retracting your head. Refrain from retracting so far that you are unable to swallow.

Supine, place the belt under your mid neck. Tuck your chin, elongate your neck and retract your head to flatten your neck into the belt. Pull on the belt to try to lift your neck, stopping just short of actually lifting it.

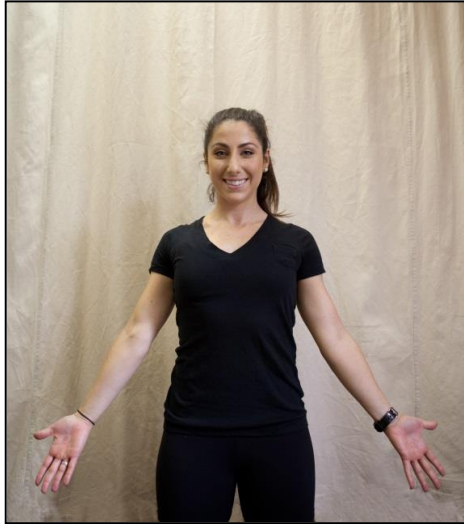


Upright, place the belt behind your mid neck. Again, tuck your chin, elongate your neck and retract your head. Pull on the belt hard enough to feel your muscles working in the front of your neck but not moving your neck or head.



Correcting your posture is essential to better neck control. Pay attention to avoid slumped sitting, protruding your head forward or downwards. You will also need to strengthen the muscles along your spine and between your shoulder blades for best results. Stay vigilant. The little things you do daily will have a tremendous cumulative effect on the health of your body and your comfort.

Flasher: Hold for _____ seconds, repeat _____ times, _____ times per day



This activity involves several actions.

1. Feel your head being pulled up by a string. This will give you the sense that your spine is elongating. Keep your chin slightly downward.
2. Place your arms behind your back so that your forearms are flat against your back, just above your waist. You may be against a wall to help hold your arms in this position.
3. Lift your chest and gently squeeze your shoulder blades together. You should feel a stretch in the front of your shoulders and chest along with the elongation of your spine.

Hold _____ seconds, _____ times per day

0 degrees
10-12 lbs.



15 degrees
27 lbs.



30 degrees
40 lbs.



45 degrees
49 lbs.



60 degrees
60 lbs.

