

EVERYTHING  
YOU NEED TO  
KNOW ABOUT

# TEXT NECK



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ellphone use is dramatically on the rise. 79 percent of the population has their cellphone with them for 22 hours a day. Did you know that the average smartphone user spends an average of 2 to 4 hours each day with his or her head dropped down? Between reading emails, sending texts, and checking social media sites, mobile device users are spending a good chunk of their day with their head tilted down staring at a screen. And as a result, cases of “text neck,” which can cause head pain, arm pain, neck pain, and numbness, are on the rise.

The issue is that as your head leans forward, it places additional weight on your spine. The more your head tilts forward, the greater this effective weight. A 15-degree angle, for example, places an additional 27 pounds of weight on your spine, while a 60-degree angle places an additional 60 pounds of weight on your spine. This can be likened to bending your finger back all the way and holding it there for an hour. The tissue stretches, becoming sore and inflamed; muscles stretch; and nerves pinch. It isn't a pretty picture.

Furthermore, a head that is tilted down cause the neck muscles to be shortened and tightened and rounds the shoulders. This kind of poor posture, in conjunction to the extra weight placed on the spine, will inevitably lead to aches and pains.

Text neck specifically refers to a constellation of different injuries and pain types that are sustained from looking down at wireless devices for too long. “People carry out their lives by text; they get carried away and don't realize they need a break,” explained Sammy Margo from the UK's Chartered Society of

Physiotherapy. “Eventually, in conjunction with a sedentary lifestyle, it could lead to serious consequences.”

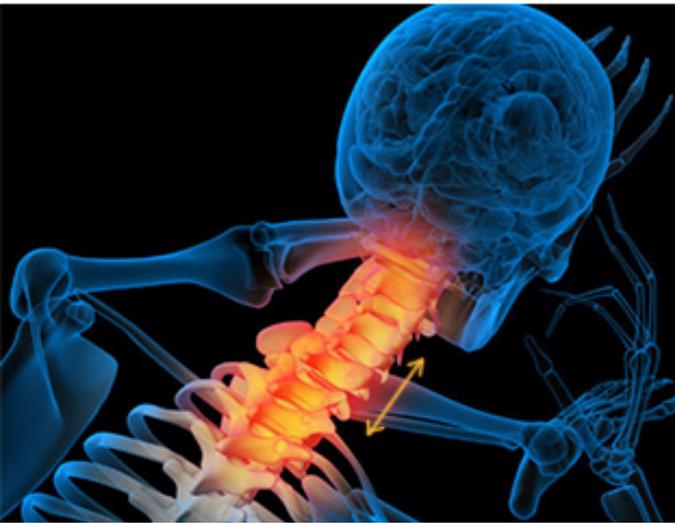
## **| What Are the Signs and Symptoms Associated with Text Neck?**

There are a number of signs and symptoms associated with text neck. These include:

**| Pain & discomfort:** The upper part of the spine is typically curved in order to ensure that the nerves have plenty of space through the neck and out into the body. However, constantly looking down at a smartphone or tablet crunches down all of that extra space, compressing the nerves. This will inevitably generate pain and discomfort. And, because the neck and back are such sensitive parts of the body, any kind of irritation, misalignment, muscle spasms, or tension can actually cause pain that will radiate down to the fingertips.



**| Misalignment:** In some cases, text neck can actually remove the neck’s natural curves, causing severe misalignment. Loss of this natural curvature of the spine can lead to a host of other problems, leading to early wear and tear and degeneration.



Ligaments stretch out, they become much looser making them less effective in holding the vertebrae into place

■ **Ligament creep:** Text neck can also cause ligament creep, in which the ligaments that hold bones together are elongated as a result of prolonged, long-term tension. When the ligaments stretch out, they become much looser, and they don't do as good of a job holding the vertebrae into place, causing them to move around more than normal. This negatively affects the discs, as well as the facet joints.

■ **Herniated discs:** All of that extra weight on the neck can do a lot of wear and tear on the spine, leading to herniated discs. "It's a lot of load, an amazing amount of weight to be carrying around your neck," explained Kenneth K. Hansraj, MD, chief of spine surgery at New York Spine Surgery & Rehabilitative Medicine. "When you have such aggressive stressors on the neck, you get wear and tear on the spine. You can develop tears within the disc, or even get a slipped or herniated disc."



If you suspect that you may be suffering from pain or discomfort associated with text neck, don't wait to seek out treatment from a medical professional. The longer you ignore the problem, the worse it will get.

## **| Can Text Neck Do Long Term Damage?**

There is no denying it: Mobile devices, from iPads to smartphones, are playing an increasingly prominent role in our everyday lives. Medical professionals are increasingly expressing concern that the text neck caused by this dramatic increase in the use of mobile devices could actually have long-term implications. Text neck is associated with poor posture, as a mobile device user will tilt his or her head down and round the shoulders forward, which has been linked to headaches, neurological issues, heart disease, and depression. Yet another study found that this kind of poor posture can actually reduce lung capacity by a staggering 30 percent.



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Text neck has also been shown to significantly increase an individual's risk of developing arthritis, causing the arthritic degeneration of the cervical spine. This is because the forward head posture that is the hallmark of text neck stretches the ligaments that hold the vertebrae together, subsequently weakening them.

Furthermore, many experts are concerned about how text neck could affect children. Remember, humans were designed to stand upright, so spending your days with your head slumped over isn't natural. "The problem is really profound in young people," Hansraj explained. "With this excessive stress in the neck, we might start seeing young people needing spine care. I would really like to see parents showing more guidance."

## **| What Can You Do to Treat the Symptoms of Text Neck?**

If you're dealing with neck pain and you feel the culprit is text neck, your best bet is to see a chiropractor or physical therapist. Chiropractic spinal manipulation, which applies force to misaligned or fixed vertebral structures, can be helpful in addressing problems associated with text neck. Furthermore, other types of manual chiropractic treatment, including trigger point therapy, massage, and active release, may be beneficial.



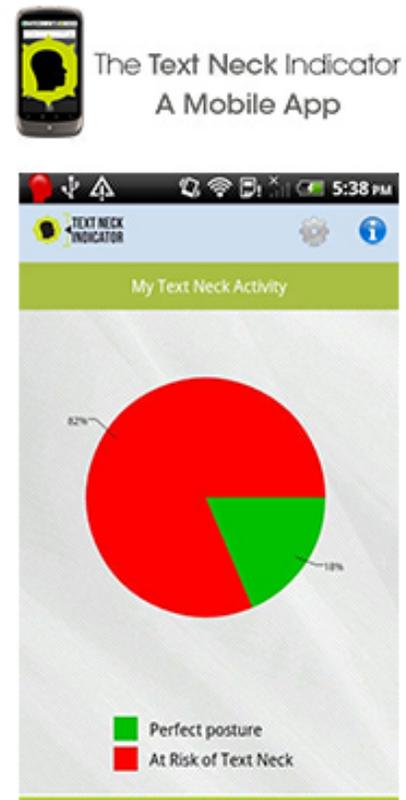
If you're suffering from neck pain related to text neck, certain exercises may also help. Prone neck extensions and prone arm abductions, for example, can help strengthen key muscles, reducing stress and tension on the neck and spine. The key is to come up with a comprehensive treatment plan that involves both pain relief and muscle strengthening, in conjunction with changes to your habits.

## How Can You Prevent Text Neck?

It is far better to try to prevent text neck than it is to treat it. Especially in the case of children and adolescents, developing healthy mobile device habits now can mean significantly less pain and misery down the line. Luckily, preventing text neck is relatively easy to do. All you need to do is straighten up and look

forward. First of all, make sure you aren't slouched over — you want to avoid rounded shoulders and a neck that is tilted forward. The key is to make sure that you can draw a vertical line from your ear to shoulder. Secondly, make sure you aren't looking down at your mobile device for too long. Instead of tilting your chin down to look at your mobile device, try raising your mobile device up. Ideally, you want the monitor screen to be at eye level so that your head isn't constantly dropping down.

Wondering how you can keep your posture in check while you are using your mobile device?



Well, luckily there is an app for that. Florida chiropractor Dean L. Fishman has created an app called Text Neck for Android, which offers immediate real-time feedback regarding posture by indicating whether you are standing in a correct position or not via a red light or green light. An optional vibration or beep feature will also let you know when you've slipped back into bad habits.

So, no, you don't have to abandon your smartphone altogether to prevent text neck. Making a few minor adjustments to develop healthy mobile device habits should do the trick. "While it is nearly impossible to avoid the technologies that cause these issues, individuals should make an effort to look at their phones with a neutral spine and to avoid spending hours each day hunched over," Hansraj said. "I love technology. I'm not bashing technology in any way. My message is: Just be cognizant of where your head is in space. Continue to enjoy your smartphones and continue to enjoy this technology – just make sure your head is up."

# OUR DOCTORS



## **David Perna DC, CCSP, CCEP**

Dr. Perna uses an integrated approach to help his patients. He has focused his post-graduate studies on soft tissue techniques as well as exercise rehabilitation. This experience is why he treats professional athletes as well as weekend warriors with great success.

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## **Dr Shan Sivendra MD**

Dr. Shan Sivendra is the Director of Medicine for the Back and Body Medical group in Midtown Manhattan and has been practicing in the New York Metro Area since 1995. He is the Director of House Physicians at St. Barnabas Medical Center in Livingston, New Jersey and is working towards a certification in acupuncture.





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