

Office-Related
**Neck &
Shoulder
Pain**



BACK & BODY

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If you're coming home with a sore neck and aching shoulders after a day at the office, you aren't alone. Office-related neck and shoulder pain is actually quite common, often a result of poor posture, a poor desk setup, or too much time spent sitting. Here, we will break down the causes of office-related neck and shoulder pain, as well as how to avoid it and how to treat it.

I What Causes Office-Related Neck & Shoulder Pain?

Office-related neck and shoulder pain is rarely caused by one specific event of injury. Rather, office-related neck and shoulder pain is most often the cumulative effect of bad habits that reduce blood flow to the neck, upper back, and shoulder area and put extra stress on the joints and ligaments. Keep in mind that static loading is one of the primary culprits of neck and shoulder pain. When your muscles have to hold the body in one position for a long time, known as static loading, it can cause pain. Additional causes of office-related neck and shoulder pain include:

I **Shoulder abduction:** Having the elbows positioned outside of the body causes shoulder abduction, which will often lead to shoulder pain. This often occurs when a mouse is put on a different elevation than a keyboard or poorly situated armchair rests.

I **Internal shoulder rotation:** Rotating the shoulders inward is often caused by hands positioned in front of the body, causing shoulder pain. Internal shoulder rotation is most commonly caused by using a keyboard that is too narrow for your shoulders.

I **Rounded shoulders:** Rounded shoulders are commonly caused by poor posture, a computer monitor that is too low or tilted down, or inadequate arm support. Rounded shoulders reduce blood and nerve supply to muscles in the shoulders, arms, and forearms, causing pain and discomfort. Continually

sitting with rounded shoulders in the long term can cause adaptive muscle changes in the chest, back, and upper neck, and it can actually increase your risk of degeneration and osteoarthritis.

I Neck extension: Adopting a position in which the chin extends far out from the chest places vertebrae in your neck and back in non-neutral positions, which can cause headaches, tension neck syndrome, and adaptive muscle changes. This is often caused by a computer monitor that is too high or a chair that is too low.

I Neck flexion: The opposite of neck extension, neck flexion, in which the chin is positioned downward too close to the chest, also puts vertebrae in your neck and back in non-neutral positions. Like neck extension, neck flexion can often cause headaches, tension neck syndrome, and adaptive muscle changes. This is caused by constantly looking down at documents or by a computer monitor that is placed too low.

Neck and shoulder pain are often caused by one or more of the above, resulting in fatigued and strained muscles.



Tips & Tricks to Avoid Office-Related Neck & Shoulder Pain

Obviously, dealing with neck and shoulder pain after a long day at the office is no fun. Luckily, there are a few simple things you can do to avoid having a sore neck and shoulders.

I Make sure that you have good posture. One of the most effective ways to prevent neck and shoulder pain is to maintain good posture throughout the day. Good posture ensures that you are aligned in a way that distributes stress evenly across all of your muscles and ligaments, reducing overall wear and tear and also reducing your risk of joint discomfort and degenerative arthritis.

What, exactly, is good posture? Ideally, when you are sitting at your desk your feet should be firmly planted flatly on the floor, your thighs should be parallel to the ground, your lumbar region (lower back) should be sufficiently supported, and your shoulders should be relaxed. In addition, you should make sure that your elbows are supported and that your wrists and hands are in line with your forearms in order to keep your back in proper positioning.

Of course, maintaining good posture is easier said than done. As the day wears on, it is only natural that you will become more tired, which tends to lead to slouching. The key is to make a concerted effort to be aware of your posture all day long. If you are really having trouble maintaining good posture, try doing yoga or tai chi. This can help you become more aware of your body's position, as well as help you hold certain postures.

I Be aware of the positioning of your head. Poor head posture can and will lead to serious neck pain. In fact, one of the most common causes of office-related neck pain is “poking chin” posture, in which the chin pokes forward while you are reading or looking at a computer monitor. This positioning of the head puts extra pressure on the tissues in the neck, which can lead to pain and discomfort in the head, neck, and shoulders.



I Adjust your computer monitor. Your computer monitor should always sit about arm’s distance away from you, and the top of your screen should be just below eye level. The monitor, as well as they keyboard, should always be centered right in front of you. Having to constantly look up at the monitor or having to constantly twist or turn your neck to see it will cause neck pain.

I Stay active. To avoid static loading, avoid sitting at your desk all day long. Try to build

small, active breaks from sitting into your workday. “Spread out returning phone calls, using the copier, or speaking with coworkers through the day,” Chris Sorrells, an occupational therapist and ergonomics specialist, advised. “That way, you’ll switch which muscle groups you are using but will still be productive.” Sorrells specifically suggests taking a 10-minute walk every 2 to 3 hours, as well as taking a microbreak every half an hour or so to shake out your hands and arms and relax your head and neck.

I Get a headset. If your job requires that you talk on the phone for hours every day, it is probably a wise idea to invest in a headset. Cradling the phone between your ear and your shoulder is never a good idea, and it can seriously strain the muscles in your neck and shoulders. Specifically, the act of cradling the phone causes neck abduction, which means the head is tilted to one side. When this is combined with shoulder elevation, it significantly cuts blood flow and nerve supply to the neck, the upper back, and the shoulders.

Treating Office-Related Neck & Shoulder Pain

If you are experiencing office-related neck and shoulder pain, in order to treat the pain, you will need to identify the cause of the pain and make the appropriate adjustments. In many cases, it is incredibly advantageous to see a chiropractor. Chiropractors are able to effectively treat office-related neck and shoulder pain using a variety of methods, including:

I Chiropractic massage: In chiropractic massage, a chiropractor is able to adjust the spine and surrounding tissue to provide pain relief.

I Trigger point therapy: In trigger point therapy, a chiropractor will identify which areas of the muscles are in pain and place pressure on specific pain points to relieve tension.



■ **Flexion-distraction methods:** Flexion-distraction methods help a chiropractor restore the normal physiological flexibility of your neck through gentle adjustments to stretch the spine.

■ **Inferential electrical stimulation:** A highly effective way of providing relief for acute and long-term neck pain, inferential electrical stimulation involves the stimulation of the muscles with gentle electrical currents.

It should be noted that the most effective way to treat office-related neck and shoulder pain will depend on the specifics of each case, including the causes and the severity of pain. A chiropractor can develop a comprehensive treatment program to reduce pain.

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.

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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