

# OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Steven L. Smith, DC

## Don't Let Computer Use Be a Pain in the Neck

*Many people spend a large portion of their days sitting at a computer. And most of them aren't doing it properly — causing significant pain and discomfort, especially in the neck. We can't do much about our ties to the computer, but we can take some simple steps to protect our necks. That's why Dr. Smith focuses on teaching patients how to prevent and alleviate neck pain from computer use.*



### First, Schedule a Checkup

Visiting our office is an important first step in keeping computer-related neck pain at bay. Using gentle maneuvers called **chiropractic adjustments**, Dr. Smith removes **vertebral subluxations**, which are triggered by the unnatural posture required by computer use. Vertebral subluxations are areas in the spine where vertebrae (spinal bones) are slightly out of place or misaligned.

Research demonstrates that the correction of vertebral subluxations via chiropractic adjustments (spinal manipulation) alleviates neck pain.

For instance, one study published in the *Journal of the Canadian Chiropractic Association* found “statistically significant clinically meaningful improvements in neck pain ... and disability ... after an average of 13.6

days of specific chiropractic care including 5.7 office visits and 2.7 upper cervical adjustments.” (*J Can Chiropr Assoc* 2009;53:173-85.)

Researchers “conducted a comprehensive literature search of clinical trials of chronic neck pain treated with manual therapies up to December 2006.” Regarding chiropractic care for neck pain, the researchers conclude: “There is moderate-to-high quality evidence that immediate clinically important improvements are obtained from a single session of spinal manipulation.” (*J Man Manip Ther* 2008;16:E42-52.)

Another study found that chiropractic care is more effective than massage for chronic neck pain. The researchers conclude: “There is moderate- to high-quality evidence that subjects with chronic neck pain not due to whiplash and without arm pain and headaches show clinically important improve-

ments from a course of spinal manipulation or mobilization at 6, 12, and up to 104 weeks posttreatment. The current evidence does not support a similar level of benefit from massage.” (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2007;30:215-27.)

Chiropractic adjustments are so effective for neck pain that patients often enjoy results after only one adjustment. One study of 70 patients set out to study “the immediate effects on neck pain and active cervical range of motion” after a single chiropractic adjustment to the spine of the neck (cervical spine).

Researchers randomly divided subjects into either an experimental group, which received a chiropractic adjustment, or a control group, which received a mobilization procedure. Findings revealed that a single chiropractic adjustment “was more effective in reducing neck pain at rest and in increasing active cervical range of motion than a control mobilization procedure in subjects suffering from mechanical neck pain.” (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2006;29:511-7.)

In addition to chiropractic adjustments, Dr. Smith recommends specific ergonomic strategies,



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exercises and stress-reduction techniques. These suggestions are custom-tailored for each patient's unique situation. However, below are some general recommendations.



### Ergonomics

Proper workplace ergonomics are vital to preventing computer-related neck pain. In fact, one study concludes: "We estimate that many cases of discomfort and ultimately pain in the neck region are connected with computer work that lasts too long with poor ergonomic organization." (*Ortop Traumatol Rehabil* 2005;7:204-8.)

Common problem areas include:

**Monitor:** Adjust your desk, chair and computer so the monitor is at eye level.

**Phone:** Avoid tucking the phone between your ear and shoulder. Better yet, invest in a headset.

**Chair:** Your feet should rest on the floor or on a footrest. Your knees should be slightly lower than your hips.

**Keyboard:** Your forearms should be level with the floor, with your elbows bent at 90 degrees.

**Books and papers:** Avoid twisting your neck away from the screen to see papers on the desk. Use holders to prop up books or papers at eye level directly next to your screen, and switch which side you place the holder each day.

**Laptops:** If possible, attach an external keyboard and mouse and raise the

laptop on a platform to bring the screen to eye level.

### Exercise

One comprehensive literature review set out to analyze the effectiveness of exercise therapy for neck pain.

The researchers conclude: "The evidence summarized in this systematic review indicates that specific exercises may be effective for the treatment of acute and chronic MND [mechanical neck disorder], with or without headache." (*Cochrane Database Syst Rev* 2005;CD004250.)

The doctor will discuss specifics of neck exercises that are appropriate for you, but some common exercises that may be a part of your workout include:

- ✓ Slowly bring head forward so chin hits the chest. Repeat five times.
- ✓ Slowly stretch your neck backwards until you are facing the ceiling.
- ✓ Turn your head slowly around to one side until it cannot easily go any further. Repeat five times, then do the same in the opposite direction.
- ✓ Tip your ear slowly toward your shoulder.

Typically, these exercises should be performed several times per day, during breaks from computer work.

### Stress Reduction

Research also points to a strong link between emotional stress and computer-related neck pain. A just-published report in the *European Spine Journal* set out to assess risk factors for neck pain among a group of 53 Australian office workers.

The researchers discovered that "predictors of neck pain with moderate to large effect sizes were female gender and high psychological stress." (*Eur Spine J* 2009;Epub.)

Another study found that "depression and anxiety were highly significantly linked with increasing levels of neck pain." The researchers conclude that: "The higher the neck pain level, the more attention should be paid to psychosocial distress as a related burden." (*BMC Musculoskelet Disord* 2009;10:13.)

The doctor advises patients to investigate their specific stress-related triggers of neck pain. The doctor also recommends stress-reduction techniques, such as yoga, meditation, prayer, t'ai chi, breathing exercises, social activity and spending time in nature.

### Don't Wait

Whether or not you are experiencing pain, if you spend any significant amount of time at a computer, don't put off scheduling a chiropractic appointment. Even if you are not in pain, computer work may have triggered vertebral subluxations that will eventually result in pain and dysfunction. Don't delay: Schedule an appointment with our office today.



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