

Office work can be a pain in the neck

December 15 2017



Credit: University of Queensland

Neck pain is a common condition among office workers, but regular workplace exercises can prevent and reduce it, a University of Queensland study has found.

Newly published research by PhD graduate and physiotherapist Dr Xiaoqi Chen from UQ's School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences revealed neck and shoulder-strengthening exercises and general fitness training exercises were effective in reducing and preventing neck [pain](#).

"Any office worker will tell you they or one of their colleagues has experienced neck or shoulder pain," Dr Chen said.

"It is a prevalent and recurring condition often due to prolonged stationary postures associated with computer use and sitting at a desk for long periods of time.

"We found that when participants who experienced neck pain regularly took part in our exercises at their workplace, their pain was reduced.

"Those who took part in about two thirds of our strengthening exercise sessions showed greater reductions in neck pain, compared to those who were involved less."

Dr Chen said the research had aimed to provide evidence for interventions at the workplace, driven by a lack of published research on workplace interventions for neck pain.

"Neck pain causes impact on the individual, and also on organisations and the healthcare system due to costs of required for treatment, reduced productivity, and workers' compensation claims," Dr Chen said.

Globally, neck pain was ranked as the fourth most common disability, measured by years of life lost due to disability.

"Employers are becoming more proactive about incorporating wellness strategies and interventions in their workplaces and this research is evidence to inform and support their decisions," she said.

Dr Chen said little research had been done on preventing [office workers'](#) neck pain and there were few high-quality studies even on ergonomic workstation adjustments.

"Before our work, evidence on office workers' neck pain was limited to a single high-quality trial that found combined neck endurance and stretching exercises were effective for office workers at risk," she said.

"I'm excited that our study feeds into the global body of knowledge but undoubtedly further research into office workers' neck pain is needed."

The researchers reviewed 27 randomised controlled trials with office worker participants. Exercise and ergonomic interventions were performed at the workplace, and neck and/or neck and [shoulder pain](#) intensity and incidence was compared with data from office workers who had no exercise interventions.

Meanwhile, School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences researchers have recently completed a study to identify any productivity boost flowing from workplace-based, best-practice ergonomic and exercise interventions.

The same project also is investigating severity of [neck](#) pain in [office](#) workers. The results will be available early next year.

As a physiotherapist, Dr Chen recommends exercises that can be done specifically for [neck pain](#) including – but not limited to – shoulder front raises, side raises, reverse flies and shrugs using weights or resistance bands.

"Anyone starting a new [exercise](#) regime should consult their doctor first," Dr Chen said.

The study is published in *Physical Therapy*.

More information: Xiaoqi Chen et al. Workplace-Based Interventions for Neck Pain in Office Workers: Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis, *Physical Therapy* (2017). [DOI: 10.1093/ptj/pzx101](https://doi.org/10.1093/ptj/pzx101)

Provided by University of Queensland

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