

Preventing iPosture pain

13 November 2014, by Carolyn Pennington



Technology has its benefits but sometimes it can be a pain in the neck – literally. Health care professionals often use the terms "text neck" or "iPosture" to describe the position we take when using our electronic devices, which can often lead to headaches, back pain, and aching shoulders. And for younger users, there are long-term health consequences for their developing bodies.

Since most of us won't abandon our go-to-gadgets, is there anything we can do to help prevent the [pain](#)?

UConn Health physical therapist Nancy Craven is a board-certified orthopedic clinical specialist, and teaches human anatomy in the UConn Doctorate in Physical Therapy Program. She offered UConn Today some simple tips to keep in mind the next time you catch yourself hunched over your high-tech tool.

Q. What is iPosture?

A. iPosture is the posture that people take – especially [young adults](#) – when they're working on their [entertainment media](#), such as their iPhone, smart phones, or laptop computers. It's a slumped-

over posture. Usually their heads are looking downward, their shoulders are slumping, and their lower back is compressed. It puts a lot of strain on their upper back and their neck.

Q. Are there any long-term consequences to this bad posture?

A. If you look at some of the recent studies, for instance – the Kaiser Family Foundation survey found that 8- to 18-year-olds are spending at least seven and a half hours each day on their entertainment media. That's a long time to be in that position. These are developing individuals, so their bones, joints, muscles, and everything else are still developing, and it puts a lot of stress and strain on their joints for a long period of time.

Q. So when they are older, middle age, what is it going to be like for them?

A. That's the concern. They're putting more stress and strain on their muscles and their joints now, which can lead to early degeneration later. They'll suffer chronic neck and upper back pain, headaches, and even arthritis. Degenerative arthritis forms because the alignment is not correct. With these kids' spinal alignment being off at such a young age, arthritis will set in earlier, which could lead to the need for medications, or even surgery.

Q. What can we do to avoid iPosture?

A. There are some general things you can do as a young adult—and as parents we can remind our children of these.

What you want to do is bring the device up to eye level, so you are looking straight at the device versus looking down and slumping forward.

Another thing you want to do is to sit back in your chair, so you're not slumping forward like we see all of our kids doing when they're watching television or when they're working on their devices.

Use both hands while texting. Lots of people use just one hand which can lead to tension and pain in their hands as well as shoulders and neck. Tingling in the hands is due to the muscles in your shoulder pushing on nerve fibers that run through the neck and into the arm. Using both hands will help distribute and relieve some of that tension.

Set an alarm to remind you to check posture or change your position. You can set your alarm on vibrate so other people don't have to hear it but set it for every 15 minutes. Make sure you're getting up and moving around so you're not having this sustained posture for long periods of time. Go get a drink of water or go visit with a friend but try to get out of that position.

And finally, kids need to get out and exercise more. They need to be using their muscles and getting stronger – especially their upper back muscles – along with stretching and strengthening so they don't have these issues.

Q. Are you seeing more young people with these issues?

A. We do see more young adults complaining of postural pain. Their upper backs are tight and their upper backs are weak. They tend to complain more about back pain. In fact, a study done in the United Kingdom involving 3,000 individuals found that 18- to 24-year-olds are having more days off of work than their parent's generation because of back pain.

Provided by University of Connecticut

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