

# Newsletter

April 2003

## How To Care For Your Neck

Here are some guidelines to follow in caring for your neck. It is important to learn to use proper body positions to help reduce strain on muscles, joints, bones and ligaments as well as prevent fatigue and aggravation of pain.

Remember three important points with regard to your neck and arms:

- Everything you do with your arms affects your neck muscles
- You must learn to break up your activity into short periods of work (about 15 minutes) and then rest
- With poor head and neck posture, the muscles of the neck and head must work harder, causing strain and pain

### *ACTIVITIES*

Guidelines:

- Plan your day
- Set priorities, decide what must be done first
- Position yourself properly
- Rest frequently

### **WASHING YOUR HAIR**

- avoid stooping over a sink. Wash your hair in the shower

### **DRIVING**

- probably a painful activity for you when your neck hurts. Try to stay out of the car whenever possible. If you're driving, get close to the steering wheel. Gripping the bottom of the steering wheel will be more comfortable than gripping the top. Learn to make more use of the sideview and rearview mirrors rather than turning your head. Avoid quick stops and starts. Rest your neck against the headrest. If your neck is sore, wear your collar. Wear sunglasses for glare. If taking a long trip, get out of the car every hour or two. The change of position will relax your muscles

### **READING**

- Sit with your neck and feet supported. Have reading material at eye-level. Avoid holding material. Place book on an angle against a pile of books on a table in front of you. Avoid a sustained stooped position.

### **EYE GLASSES**

- If you have bifocals, lower reading material. Avoid tipping your head back to look at something with your glasses. If you are obtaining new glasses, do not purchase bifocals, but two pairs of glasses

## **DRINKING**

- Avoid drinking out of bottles. Do not tip your head back, but sip out of a glass or a cup, or drink with a straw.

## **LIFTING**

- Do not lift anything heavy. Hold object close to your body and keep neck and back straight. Do not reach to pick up objects

## **MOVEMENT**

- Learn to move your body in one plane, your head and feet should be facing the same direction so you do not twist. When moving a large object, position your body behind the object and use your legs and body weight. Avoid pulling an object.
- Moving from lying to sitting, roll from your back onto your side. Put ankles over the edge of the bed, push up with your arms into sitting. Reverse steps to go from sitting to lying.
- Working with something low. Place one foot in front of the other, squat down, keeping your buttocks tucked under you. Keep your back straight and chin down. Do not bend from the waist or tip head back.
- Working with something high, avoid it. Do not reach. Use a stepstool.

## **POSTURE**

- **Standing** Stand tall, buttocks tucked under. Stomach pulled in, shoulders comfortably back. Head tall and straight
- **Sitting** Sit comfortably with legs supported. Knees higher than hips; use a footstool or cross knees for temporary relief (alternate often). Buttocks slightly forward, away from back of the chair. Arms supported.
- **Lying**
  - *On your back.* One pillow under your shoulders, two under the neck and three pillows under your head in a layered fashion. Knees should be supported with two pillows in a bent position.
  - *On your side.* Usually two pillows under the head with no pillows under the shoulder so your neck complete a straight line with the spine. One pillow between the legs, round your back and bend your knees up to your chest.

## **RESTING**

- You will need short periods of rest during the day. Rest before your neck gets tired. Rest in a lying position rather than sitting. Have a firm bed or use a bedboard between spring and mattress. Pillows should be soft and light. Avoid using hard sponge pillows. Avoid lying on your stomach.

## **NECKS TAKE TIME TO FEEL BETTER – BE PATIENT**