

Chronic Pain and Your Computer

Sources say the average person sits in front of a computer from one hour to several hours per day during leisure time. Add this to the hours of work time spent on a computer, and you will see that adults can spend many hours per day sitting at a keyboard. Even reading this column, ironically, is adding to the time you are spending in front of the computer.

Forcing your body to spend so many hours in the same position can lead to chronic pain and poor biomechanics. The colloquial term "computer neck" refers to the position that rounds the shoulders and pushes the neck forward. This position is known as Upper Cross Syndrome in rehabilitation medicine. It was first described by the Czech neurologist Valdimir Janda. The muscles of the rhomboid (mid-back) and deep neck flexor (front of neck), upper traps, levator scapulae (shoulders) and pectoralis (chest) form a diagonal cross. This syndrome refers to a weakening and tightening of these upper cross muscles, which eventually alters the posture, causing the shoulders to round forward and the neck and head to tilt forward. The back increases its rearward curvature of the upper spine (called kyphotic posture) and becomes extremely stiff.

The following symptoms can result from kyphotic posture:

- Neck pain and immobility
- Mid back pain
- Cervicogenic/Migraine headaches
- Rotator cuff (shoulder) pain
- Thoracic Outlet Syndrome

There are a number of aspects involved in the treatment of Upper Cross Syndrome. Spending fewer hours in front of the computer is recommended. However, not everyone can reduce their computer hours. Improving your workstation is an important step towards putting your body in the best possible position. Whenever possible, take microbreaks at work.

Chiropractors are trained to address the symptoms of this condition. Chiropractic treatment can improve posture by initiating changes in the spine's mobility. Joint restrictions and soft tissue tightness can be improved through chiropractic care. Your chiropractor can also provide you with stretches to lengthen the tightened muscles and exercises to strengthen the weak ones. You can even do exercises throughout the day. For example, Bruegger's Postural Relief Exercise is a quick way to provide relief from long periods of sitting.

Upper Cross Syndrome is a chronic, progressive condition that can be hard to detect until it is quite advanced. If caught early it can be fixed, but if untreated for a long time, the condition can result in permanent postural dysfunction.