



# The Prevention and Treatment of Neck Pain

—Sheila Yonemoto, PT

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Many factors can contribute to a “pain in the neck,” but there are only a few true causes and several valuable ways to prevent and treat neck pain. In order to choose the most effective treatment methods, it is very important to first acquire a complete medical history from the patient to help determine which structures and activities have been the primary cause of the pain. The doctor and therapist can then help to isolate a treatment approach that will best allow the injury to heal, while at the same time, prevent further pain or loss of function.

Some simple questions that provide valuable information for determining the best treatment approach are: What type of pain is it? Is it a sharp pain, dull pain, is there pain with movement and or pain at rest? Does the pain go into the arm, shoulder or upper back area? Do certain positions make it worse?

This information helps tell the practitioner what structures might be involved and whether or not more sophisticated testing might be needed. Pinpointing the structures involved and reproducing the symptoms within the examination allows the therapist to focus on the actual source of the problem and not just treat the symptoms!



Sheila Yonemoto, PT—Owner, Yonemoto Physical Therapy

Once the primary source of the neck pain is localized, the right combination of treatment methods, hands-on techniques, movement and posture re-training, exercise and adjusting your work environment can be formulated in order to get the patient out of pain and rapidly back to regular pain-free function!

The sometimes significant challenge of treating “a pain in the neck” shares with it a very satisfying reward when the pain is gone and the patient’s function is returned to normal. Please read on to learn more about helpful tips in preventing and treating painful neck conditions.

# NECK PAIN SOURCES and SOLUTIONS



*Bad habits can come in the form of sitting slouched, standing with shoulder's rounded forward and reading while lying in bed.*

**N**eck problems and pain can be present in many different ways and with many different symptoms. Most neck pain is often avoidable if a few simple rules are followed. Neck pain can be caused by poor posture, age-related wear and tear, stress or other trauma. Symptoms can present themselves in a variety of ways: neck pain, headaches, jaw pain or TMJ (Temporal Mandibular Joint,) pain in the shoulder region and sometimes pain or numbness down the arm.

The most common type of neck pain seen by Physical Therapists is caused by poor posture. Poor posture can generally be defined as forward rounded shoulders and a forward head position. This posture is often found from improper computer or workstation set-up and bad habits. While sitting at a computer, it is important to sit all the way back in the chair. Arms should be supported on the armrests. The keyboard should be within comfortable distance without reaching up, down or forward. The computer monitor should be at eye level and about one arm's-length away. The chair should be at a height allowing the hips and knees to be flexed about 90 degrees. If the desk or keyboard is too high, the chair should be adjustable and can be adjusted higher with a footstool to maintain the proper hip and knee position.

Bad habits can come in the form of sitting slouched, standing with shoulders rounded forward and reading while lying in bed. Good posture requires standing tall, chin tucked slightly in and shoulders pulled back.

Another bad habit is carrying a bag over one shoulder or carrying more weight on one side versus the other. This can lead to tightness on one side, straining the side with more weight. It is preferred to use a backpack with two straps or to carry equal weight across the body.

Car accidents often lead to a whiplash injury, causing trauma to the muscles in the front of the neck. After initial healing, sometimes done in a cervical collar, Physical Therapy can help to regain motion, strength and function.

Stress also leads to or intensifies neck pain and can cause headaches. This happens by increasing tension in the muscles traveling from the upper shoulder/back region up to the neck. As tension increases, pain can refer into the head causing headaches. This increased tension can also pull into the jaw region and cause jaw pain, also known as TMJ.

While performing day-to-day activities, the main thing to remember is posture. Posture applies to the whole back, but do not forget the importance of the neck. For example, when lifting an object, it is important to keep the lower back straight, bend at the knees, keep

the object close to the body, all while keeping your head and neck tall. If the last step is forgotten and the neck is allowed to flex forward, the whole back will likely round and cause a strain.

Another consideration is driving position. If the seat is reclined or positioned too far back from the steering wheel, the driver has to reach forward. This position rounds the shoulders forward and flexes the neck, which is the

definition of poor posture. A simple solution is for the driver to sit close enough to the steering wheel so that they do not have to reach. Also, to keep their back fairly upright so that the neck is tall, shoulders are back and arms relaxed with shoulders down.

Less known symptoms from cervical pain are pain into the shoulders and tingling and/or numbness down the arm. This can occur because the nerves

exit at each level of the neck and can become compressed with either increased muscle tension, increased inflammation or a bulging disc. These symptoms usually respond very well to Physical Therapy by decreasing muscle tension, increasing range-of-motion and increasing the space between the joints with traction.

# Tips and Tricks

## POSTURE & EXERCISE TIPS



1. Sit all the way to the back of your chair. Arms should be supported, but relaxed at your side. Ideally the chair armrests are low enough to fit under the desk and can support your elbows while your hands and wrists access the keyboard. Another possible position is to rest your arms and elbows on the desk or table keeping your wrists and hands free.

2. While sitting, the hips and knees should be flexed about 90 degrees. Feet should be supported on a foot stool or the floor. If your feet and legs don't have support they will pull on your back which can cause numbness in your legs. If your hips and legs are positioned with your knees higher than your hips, your lower back becomes rounded which can cause an overall rounded posture, straining your neck.



3. While working at the computer, the top of the monitor should be at forehead level and the keyboard one arm's length away - so that you aren't reaching for the keyboard. The monitor should be straight ahead so you don't have to turn your head to the side to see it.

4. A simple stretch to do while sitting is to pull the shoulder blades down and back. A helpful hint for this is to think about moving your shoulder blades towards your back pockets. Also, while performing this stretch, bend and stretch your neck slightly forward and then bend your head first to one side and then the other.



5. Another stretch: tuck your chin in slightly, lengthening the muscles in the back of your neck and creating a double-chin. Do this while squeezing the shoulders back and sitting tall.

6. Stretch or reposition every 30 minutes.



# FAQ - Frequently Asked Questions

**I am having pain and tingling down my arm. Could this be related to my neck?**

Yes. The nerve structures travel between the joints in your neck and all of the way down to your finger tips. "Pinching" these nerves can send pain and/or tingling anywhere along their path.

**I've been told I have a bulging disc. Can Physical Therapy help?**

Yes. Physical Therapy can help to restore mobility and open joint spaces in the neck, decreasing how much the disc affects you. If the disc bulge is significant, pushes and/or pinches on a nerve, you need to consult with your doctor to discuss whether or not you might need surgery.

**I have a lot of headaches, possibly migraines. Can this be helped by treating my neck?**

Often headaches are caused by and referred from the

tension in the neck and the upper shoulder muscles. By decreasing this tension and restoring range-of-motion, the headaches often decrease or go away completely.

**How can I improve my posture while reading?**

If you choose to read in bed, sit up as much as possible and support your back with pillows. Then use a pillow or tray to tip the book toward you so you don't have to bend your neck while reading. Otherwise, while reading always try to have the book more in front of you than in your lap and support the book so it faces you, versus flat on the table.

**How many pillows should I sleep with?**

Only one under your head. If you sleep on your back, it should be thin enough to not push your head forward and out of alignment. If you sleep on your side, your pillow should be just thick enough to take up the space between your bed and your head, keeping it straight in alignment.

**Take this simple test...**

**Call your Physical Therapist if you:**

YES	NO	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Have stiffness in your hand, elbow, shoulder, back or knee when you are in cold places such as the frozen food aisle at the supermarket.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Have pain when holding a book.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Have had a severe injury or surgery to a hand, elbow, shoulder, back or knee.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Must take medication for pain in your hand, elbow, shoulder, back or knee more than once a week.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Stopped doing hobbies and sports because you have trouble moving your hand, elbow, shoulder, back or knee.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Have cramps or pain in your hands while writing.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Have had pain, stiffness or swelling in or around a joint during the past 12 months, especially in the morning.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Have difficulty performing everyday tasks such as tying your shoes, buttoning a button, lifting full pots off of a stove, or chopping food.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Have crooked fingers and/or funny bumps by your knuckles.



**Results:**

**Less than 1 Yes**  
You're doing fine. Exercising may help keep your joints in check.

**Between 2 and 6 Yeses**  
Physical Therapy could definitely be an option for you.

**More than 6 Yeses**  
Call us for a free, no obligation consultation at 626-576-0591.

**Simply place a check mark in the appropriate box. Once you are done, calculate the number of checks in the YES column and look at the results.**



# Featured Employee

## Carole Kishi



Carole Kishi is originally from the West Los Angeles area where she spent most of her childhood. Her family relocated to Poulsbo, Washington when she was fifteen, and Carole attended high school and college in Washington state. While studying at the University of Washington in Seattle, Carole worked as a student athletic trainer for the women's basketball and tennis teams.

After completing her undergraduate studies, Carole earned her Doctorate in Physical Therapy from Mount Saint Mary's College in Los Angeles with special emphasis in orthopedic injuries. Carole is currently taking continuing education courses to advance her skills in integrative manual therapy, which was introduced to her during her clinical rotation. Carole practices a combination of traditional physical therapy and integrative manual therapy in order to treat a wide range of patients.

Carole has many interests aside from physical therapy. She grew up playing team sports and continues to play basketball today. She also enjoys traveling to different countries to experience other cultures and food.

# SUCCESS STORIES

## Patients Spread the Word

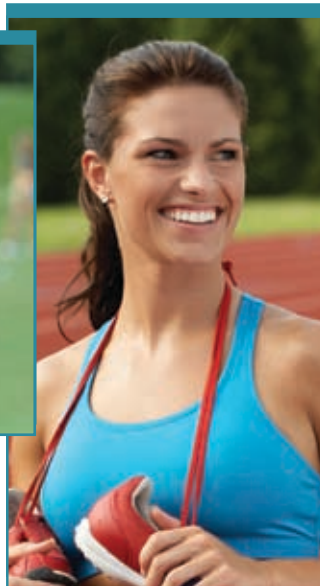
When I first came to your practice, I was in a lot of pain due to my neck and headaches. But throughout my therapy I began to feel much better, mainly due to the brilliant work of the staff.

-AM, 44

I am so grateful to you for getting me back to being able to do my regular activities. I chose to be treated due to some arthritis in my right hip, leg and my back. They knew that I needed to improve rapidly due to a scheduled trip. They really pushed me to accomplish that before I left.

My physical therapists immediately helped me recognize improvement due to their work with me, as well as the encouragement they gave me, which helped me in wanting to religiously do my exercises at home.

-VF, 68



When I first started therapy with your practice, I was dealing with headaches and major muscle tension in my upper/mid back and neck region. As the sessions of therapy went on, the headaches went away and the tension was minimized.

-AP, 35

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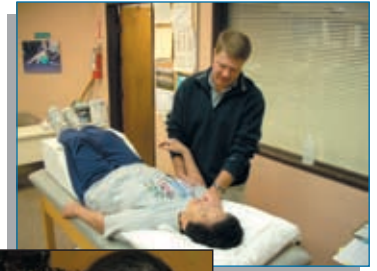
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Yonemoto Physical Therapy has successfully treated patients since 1982. We provide several therapy programs ranging from Integrative Manual Therapy, wellness programs, Worksteps which provides services for employers, chi-gong, as well as therapy for common orthopedic problems such as backaches, knee injuries and twisted ankles and pool therapy programs.

Other specialties include orthopedics and sports medicine, TMJ, chronic headaches, Bell's Palsy, urinary incontinence, and low back pain from pregnancy.

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**The Prevention and Treatment of Neck Pain**

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