

9 Natural Ways To Get
Relief From Persistent

NECK AND UPPER BACK PAIN...



*...WITHOUT The Use Of Medications, Injections Or Surgery,
Even If You Have Suffered For Years.*



FYZICAL[®]
Therapy & Balance Centers

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About the Author

David Ebbecke

Since 1997, David has been helping individuals in Prince William County overcome pain and disability. Following in the footsteps of his friend and mentor, David S. Mizener, David took ownership of FYZICAL Therapy and Balance Centers-Manassas. (formerly Piedmont Physical Therapy) in 2009 and continues to see patients in the clinic daily.



David had his sights set on a career in the healthcare field from a young age. He chose physical therapy after witnessing the transformation it had on his father who was suffering from a painful shoulder injury at the time.

Drawing from an extensive background in orthopedics and sports rehabilitation, David integrates his skills as a manual therapist and exercise specialist to assist patients in living a life without pain and reliance on pain medication. He has published numerous articles on managing and avoiding common musculoskeletal injuries.

David's Credentials & Practice Experience:

- Master of Physical Therapy (MPT) from Shenandoah University in 1996.
- Certification in Manual Therapy (MTC) from The University of St. Augustine in 2001.
- Doctorate in Physical Therapy (DPT) from Shenandoah University in 2004.
- Orthopedic Clinical Specialist (OCS) certification in 2006 recognizing advanced clinical proficiency in orthopedic physical therapy practice.
- Took ownership of Piedmont Physical Therapy, Inc. in 2009.
- Certified practitioner in Trigger Point Dry Needling from Kinetacore in 2013.
- Titleist Performance Institute (TPI) Level III golf fitness instructor certification (Medical) in 2014.
- Certified Functional Medicine Practitioner (CFMP) from FMU in 2018.

Introduction

In this special report, I present you with 9 powerful yet easy to implement strategies for helping alleviate or reduce your chances of suffering from neck pain (plus 3 bonus tips!). Although presented in no particular order, they all have one thing in common...they all work! Entrepreneur and author W. Clement Stone once said, “Little hinges swing big doors”. It may just turn out to be that the simplest advice will achieve the greatest results.

Without knowing the specifics of your neck pain, I cannot tell you which of these strategies will work best. However, over the past 20 years, I have been able to narrow down what really does and does not work when it comes to easing neck pain.

Once you have read through this report, I challenge you to incorporate at least one of these 9 tips each day. I think you will be pleasantly surprised how much better your neck will feel by doing so.

Whether you suffer from severe neck pain or just occasional stiffness. Whether you have lived with this pain for weeks, months, or even years. Whether your goal is to simply get a good night’s rest without pain or to get back in the gym once again, there is hope. There is an answer. It is likely easier, less time-consuming, and less expensive than you think. Take back the active lifestyle that you have lost or feel you may be in danger of losing. Take back your health!

*David E. Ebbecke, DPT
FYZICAL Therapy and Balance Centers-Manassas.*

1. Sit with Good Posture and Take Frequent Standing Breaks

A common myth is the notion that workers who perform strenuous physical labor are more prone to experience neck pain. In actuality, individuals who sit for much of the day (especially at a computer) account for probably 75% of the clients I treat with neck pain and stiffness. Who can't relate to a sore neck and upper back that accompanies hours spent at the computer? As mentioned in my free report on eliminating back pain and stiffness, we are just not designed to sit for such extended periods of time, no matter the engineering that goes into our chairs and computer workstations.

When we sit, there is an unavoidable tendency for the natural curvature in our lower back to reverse thereby causing the mid and upper back to do the same. Our neck is left to compensate for this – otherwise we would all be staring at the ground! This represents the classic “forward head” posture that forces our muscles to work harder, places stress on the ligaments in our spine, and causes a narrowing within the nerve canals.

The average working professional spends over 2,000 hours per year in the office — that's a lot of time spent adapting to a workspace that may not work for you. Simple things like twisting your body into odd positions, placing your feet on the rungs of your chair, and hunching over your computer really take a toll on your neck and low back.

A standing break every 30 minutes will reduce the stress placed on your neck and back. The muscles, ligaments and discs will remain much healthier, less stiff, and less prone to injury.

**See “Bonus” section for some tips to create an ergonomically designed workstation in order to minimize neck strain. **

2. Flexibility is Key in Your Thoracic Spine (Mid-Back)!

The thoracic spine is comprised of twelve vertebrae wedged in between the lumbar spine (low back) and cervical spine (neck). Available motion within the thoracic spine is less than the other regions due to connections it makes with the rib cage.

Although very critical in total spinal movement and function, the thoracic spine often receives inadequate attention because it's typically not a source of pain like the neck and lower back are. However, the key to maintaining a healthy neck and is largely dependent in the mobility in your thoracic spine.

Citing Michael Boyle, one of the foremost experts in strength and conditioning, "the body does what is easy, not what is best". The thoracic spine is particularly susceptible to stiffening as we age. Remember, it is intrinsically stiffer because of the rib cage. As a result, we tend to rotate more in the neck and lower back thus overstressing these regions. A more mobile thoracic spine can thereby help to avoid or relieve both neck and low back pain.

Increasing mobility in the thoracic spine is actually not that difficult to achieve, and it does not require incorporating rotational exercises in order to be effective. Simply perform a series of simple crunch type exercises while lying on two tennis balls fastened together, or you may even place them in a sock.

Place the tennis balls under your back with one ball on either side of the spine. Begin just above bellybutton level. With the balls in position, do five crunches. You should feel the balls pushing into the big muscles on either side of the spine. The balls are actually pushing the vertebrae slightly forward, in effect creating motion (mobility) at the level of that segment. A series of these crunches can be done all the way to the top of the shoulder blades. Another strategy is to foam roll the thoracic spine. Make sure the elbows are together to separate the shoulder blades and get pressure maintained on the thoracic spine.

3. Consider Using Ice vs. Heat

Ease neck pain by applying an ice pack to the painful region for 10-20 minutes. Cold therapy, unlike heat, reduces inflammation and is more effective at controlling pain. Headaches situated at the base of the skull which frequently arise from the neck often respond particularly well cold.

You may apply cold several times per day..., there really is no limit to this safe and natural remedy. Avoid risking damage to your skin by placing adequate layers between your body and the cold pack.

And when to use heat – my advice would be to do so if you feel stiffness vs. pain which tends to be more often in the morning and/or the end of the day.

4. Avoid Sleeping on Your Abdomen

There is not a more effective, faster route to self-inflicted damage to your neck than by sleeping on your abdomen (prone). For the same reasons that sitting with poor posture contributes to neck pain, sleeping in the prone position causes strain the muscles and joints in the neck by being maintained in rotation so we can breathe. We can all relate to the aching and stiffness felt in our knees if in a knelt position for too long. This is very similar to what your neck goes through in the prone position. One more example to help you relate..., imagine how the neck feels after long periods of working overhead. You get the point!

I am often asked for my recommendation as to the “ideal” sleep posture. Positioned on your side or your back are what I advise. If on your side, place a pillow between your knees to avoid twisting that is more likely to occur in the hips and spine. If you prefer to sleep on your back, place 1-2 pillows under your knees to ease stress placed on the spine.

5. Reduce Stress at Home and at Work

While emotional stress does not directly cause pain, it does influence the muscles in our neck, upper back and shoulders causing them to tighten. This is where the term “tension headache” arises from. A muscle in a continuous state of tension (contraction) eventually results in pain, in part, due to an interruption of blood flow to that tissue. A vicious circle of more pain leading to more spasm then occurs which can lead to an increase in emotional and physical stress.

Habits such as reducing caffeine intake, keeping active, practicing relaxation techniques with activities such as yoga, meditation, massage and seeking medical treatment for

anxiety are all used to help reduce stress which can contribute to neck pain.

6. Stay Hydrated

Our spinal discs require water in order to maintain their height and proper alignment, as well as to reduce pressures where there shouldn't be. Disc material is roughly 80 percent water at the time of birth with water concentration decreasing as we age and the disc degenerates.

By maintaining strong daily hydration habits, we may prevent further degeneration of cervical discs, which may reduce neck pain.

One very simple way to stay well hydrated is to eliminate or at least reduce certain drinks that promote dehydration in the first place. Excessive intake of coffee, tea, and energy drinks can promote dehydration as consequence of drinking too much of them.

Furthermore, being dehydrated can cause muscle aches and pains, fatigue and dizziness. It is therefore important that you keep on top of your water intake to ease unwanted tension in your neck muscles.

My tip... drink small quantities of water often and throughout the day.

7. Get a Good Night's Rest

Just as the presence of neck pain may interfere with our quality of sleep, so too exists a relationship between inadequate rest an increased chance of having neck pain regardless of age, sex, depression or prior treatments received. There are several processes which occur in our bodies to help reduce pain and inflammation when we sleep, therefore treating a sleep disorder may prove necessary to help break this cycle in individuals suffering with neck pain.

There are many effective strategies for improving sleep quality which include:

- **Keeping active** - Exercise such as walking, cycling, playing sports and spending time at the gym causes endorphin release in our bodies that help us to sleep better (and lose weight too!). However, strenuous exercise performed too close

to bedtime may actually impair our ability to get to and remain asleep. Personally, I don't recommend exercising hard first thing in the morning as well since our bodies need a little of time to adjust the normal stress of weight bearing activity upon awakening.

- **Maintain a regular sleep schedule** - Going to bed at the same time helps to maintain the biological clock in rhythm. If you find yourself requiring a nap during the day, try to limit it to 15-20 minutes to avoid difficulty falling asleep at bedtime. Though very short in duration, these "power naps" can go a long way toward re-energizing our bodies and minds in order to carry through the rest of the day.
- **Refrain from certain activities before bedtime** - Particularly stressful/stimulating activities just before bed affect our ability to wind down. Substituting the television for some reading, or listening to some soft music helps us to get mentally prepared for rest
- **Limit caffeine, alcohol and nicotine use** - These substances all produce reactions in the body which impair our ability to get a good night's sleep. Avoid caffeine intake for 8 hours prior to going to bed as its stimulating effects are long-lasting in the body.
- **Don't try to "force" sleep** - Remaining in bed if you are having trouble sleeping will increase anxiety thereby decreasing your chances of falling asleep. This used to happen to me a lot. Instead of forcing it, get out of bed and engage in a relaxing activity such as reading, listen to some soothing music or even take a hot bath. Return to bed when you are more relaxed. Methods of relaxation like deep breathing and/or meditation may also help you relax and better prepare you for sleep.

8. Incorporate Neck Strengthening Exercises in Your Routine

The "forward head" posture described earlier in this report is almost a universal problem encountered by desk workers, especially those who spend a substantial portion of the day at a computer. The consequences of maintaining such a posture are

particularly hard on the neck which must take the brunt of the stress through compensation strategies to maintain eyes level with the horizon.

Over time, the muscles and ligaments of the neck weaken thereby making it harder to hold the head in the position needed to perform a task and setting into motion muscle tightness and subsequent pain.

Mom's order to "sit up straight" was certainly very sound advice (after all, moms are never wrong), but to achieve and maintain this without properly strengthening the muscles which enable us to do so is very difficult. If I wish to acquire more strength in my arms and legs, I choose specific resistance exercises to target the muscles in these regions. Why presume the muscles of the spine are any different? They're not.

Below are some examples of basic yet very effective exercises for the neck you can incorporate into your routine. As with ALL exercises, these should not cause pain, and should be immediately stopped if that occurs. Our physical therapists can help you to discover which neck exercises are most suitable based on your symptoms.



Figure 1. Chin Tuck (start position)



Figure 2. Chin Tuck (end position)



Figure 3. Superman (start position)



Figure 4. Superman (end position)



Figure 5. Wall Angel (start position)



Figure 6. Wall Angel (end position)



Figure 7. Prone "W" (start position)



Figure 8. Prone "W" (end position)

9. Solve the Problem with Physical Therapy

Physical therapy will get to the root of what is causing your neck pain. Whether you have pulled a muscle, have weakness which often contributes to headaches as well, or just had surgery for a neck problem, a properly trained physical therapist will utilize treatment strategies to help provide relief.

Many of my patients are surprised when they learn that physical therapy involves much more than exercise alone. An average patient visit consists of at least 50%-60% direct “hands-on” intervention. The manual component of care is critical for patients to recover ranging from soft tissue and joint work, myofascial release, dry needling and neuromuscular facilitation exercises (to name a few) to help restore normal movement patterns. Exercises that include neck and postural strengthening are very important too. They are used to reinforce the changes made with the manual therapy component of the treatment.

In the State of Virginia, a patient can seek treatment directly from a physical therapist without a physician prescription. The overwhelming majority of patients I talk to are not familiar with this fact. Studies have shown physical therapists to be excellent diagnosticians of musculoskeletal problems, and that is why we have this privilege. Just as a chiropractor will communicate with your primary care or specialist physician, so too do physical therapists. This ensures a comprehensive approach to your care, not to mention saving you both time and money.

Once the diagnosis is made, a physical therapist will then design an individualized treatment plan.... your roadmap to recovery. There is no “one size fits all approach”. Exercises to improve your strength, flexibility and balance are best done through a controlled, progressive program monitored by a physical therapist who specializes in spine care.

It is always my mission as a physical therapist to help patients achieve their personal goals. Whether it is sleeping through the night without pain, getting back to gardening, or completing your first marathon, it is all about improving your quality of life. For this reason alone, don't rely on a DIY approach to solving your neck pain.

Bonus Section

1. Neck-Saving Tips for Your Computer Workstation

To obtain good posture may require constantly monitoring it while working on the computer or at your desk. The goal is for it to become second nature. By achieving this, you can go home at the end of the day without the aches and pains.

To achieve an ideal neck posture for maximum efficiency (and the least effort) while sitting requires proper positioning of the trunk, arms and legs. The neck is the final segment in a series of joints which start at our feet. It is therefore imperative that we address these parts as well when designing an optimal setup.

Head and neck:

- Ears and shoulders should be in a straight line.
- Visual distance of eyes should be 18"-28" from monitor screen.
- Top 1/3 of monitor should be at eye-level.
- Hold your head at a slight downward tilt to avoid straining muscles in your neck and shoulders.

Back and upper body:

- Back should be straight with buttocks pushed to the rear of the chair.
- Lumbar spine supported in natural forward curve.
- Upper arms should be vertical to the floor.
- Avoid slumping at waist or shoulders.

Forearms, wrists and hands:

- Elbow tips should be level with center of keyboard.
- Forearms, wrists, and hands should be in a straight line.
- Forearms to upper arms should be at 90 degrees or slightly greater angle.

Legs and feet:

- Thighs-to-torso at 90 degrees or slightly greater angle. Knees should be lower than hips and chair should not press into the back of the legs.
- Feet should be flat on supported surface.

2. Stop Smoking

The list of reasons not to smoke is already quite lengthy, but research has now given us yet another which is a connection to worsening degenerative disc disease in the cervical spine in those who smoke. A Harvard study reported that the risk of developing psoriatic arthritis was twice as high for current vs. past smokers, and both current and past smokers were at greater risk when compared to those who had never smoked. The 2nd study (Paris, France) found that smokers had an earlier onset of inflammatory back / neck pain and a worse course of the disease than non-smokers. Also, women were found to be more at risk than men which peaks in middle age.

In fact, many conscientious surgeons recommending a spinal fusion to a patient who smokes may refuse to perform the surgery. The reason for this insistence is because the risk of fusion failure goes up 500 percent in smokers.

3. Beware of Faulty Posture with Cell Phone and Tablet Use

It used to be common for me to advise clients to avoid cradling the phone in the neck while talking, but those days have largely passed with most employers now providing their staff with “hands-free” devices. Now, with the advent of cell phones and use of tablets, I am encountering more cases of clients with neck pain who crane their neck down to look at their phone while they text or browse the internet.

The convenience of tablets and other mobile devices has made their use widespread as they can be used almost anywhere and in so many ways. The problem is that some of the postures people adopt when using a tablet can be awkward and lead to discomfort with prolonged use.

When using a tablet, vary your posture every 15 minutes, and use a case that doubles as a tablet stand. These cases allow it to be propped up at an angle that keeps the user's head in a neutral position minimizing neck strain.

Avoid neck pain from phone use with these tips:

- Use a Bluetooth or hands-free headset to make calls.
- When you're browsing or texting, hold the phone up high to decrease the angle at which you're holding your neck.
- Take frequent breaks to stretch your neck.

Conclusion

So, there you have it...9 strategies (plus 3 bonus tips!) that you can begin incorporating into your life TODAY to improve your posture as well as ease your neck pain. Certainly, there are many additional steps which you can take to help put an end to your neck pain that go beyond these recommendations. However, if you take the initiative by applying these principles in a rigorous and disciplined fashion, you will experience a big difference in the quality of your life.

In the coming weeks, I will be sending you even more tips and advice on how to restore your active and healthy lifestyle and will share with you how physical therapy can make a positive impact in your life.

I hope this is the beginning of a great, long-term relationship where myself and my colleagues at Piedmont Physical Therapy become the source of leading-edge health advice for you and assist you in achieving your health and wellness goals.

Committed to Restoring Your Potential,

David E.

**David Ebbecke,
Specialist - Orthopedic and Balance Physical Therapist.**



WHY NOT COME IN FOR FREE?

“Did You Know We Are Offering FREE 20-Minute Discovery Consultations?”

A FREE Discovery Consultation Will Help You Better Understand Your Injury And HOW We Can Help You RECOVER.



A FREE 20-Minute Discovery Consultation one-on-one with me or one of my physical therapists would help you BETTER decide if physical therapy is right for you. My physical therapy team sets time aside EVERY DAY to listen to patient's questions and provide simple and easy to understand answers. Our goal is to get you on the road to recovery immediately.

If you've recognized you need help, but don't know where to start, then reaching out to a Physical Therapist for **FREE** is the next step. You will be giving yourself the knowledge required in this ever-changing world in healthcare. Let me and my physical therapists explain to you **WHY** you are hurting and **HOW** we can help you.

In your **Free Consultation**, you can expect to learn:

- ✓ What is the likely cause of your pain?
- ✓ How we can specifically help your injury?
- ✓ What is your unique treatment plan?
- ✓ How long will it take?
- ✓ What simple exercises you can do?
- ✓ Why do our patients LOVE us and keep returning?



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Health Advice Disclaimer

We make every effort to ensure that we accurately represent the injury advice and prognosis displayed throughout this Guide.

However, examples of injuries and their prognosis are based on typical representations of those injuries that we commonly see in our physical therapy clinics. The information given is not intended as representations of every individual's potential injury. As with any injury, each person's symptoms can vary widely and each person's recovery from injury can also vary depending upon background, genetics, previous medical history, application of exercises, posture, motivation to follow the advice of the physical therapist, and various other physical factors.

It is impossible to give a 100% complete accurate diagnosis and prognosis without a thorough physical examination and likewise the advice given for management of an injury cannot be deemed fully accurate in the absence of an examination from one of the Licensed Physical Therapists at Piedmont Physical Therapy, Inc.

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