



**Zoe Birch** is a Chartered Physiotherapist and founder of PhysioMotion, which operate three London clinics as well as providing physiotherapy at home. We're pleased to publish her second article for **SEBRA NEWS W2** and this time round Zoe discusses a common problem.

## DEALING WITH NECK PAIN

### Use your back-rest

No chair is perfect, but they have backrests for a reason. Relax into your chair and allow your shoulders to be supported by your forearms on your desk.

### Bring everything a bit closer

Over stretching for your mouse and keyboard, or to read small text on your screen can feed into that pain in your neck. A supported arm position will reduce the strain on your neck.

### Pull your chin back

A “poking chin” posture can result in the muscles in your neck to be overstretched. By pulling your chin back you’re using muscles deep in your neck, which can reduce neck pain and let the overworked muscles relax.

## 2. REDUCED ACTIVITY

Our work and home life has become more sedentary, but our bodies were made to move. Therefore a single posture for 8 hours a day is not healthy for our muscles or joints.

Movement is how joints lubricate themselves and stimulates the body to maintain their health.

So keeping still causes you to stiffen up and your muscles can de-condition. It then becomes harder to maintain your head position and neck’s range of movement, and subsequently increases the load on these sensitised neck structures.

An easy solution to this: do more activity! This could be heading to the gym after work, begin running or cycling to work or going for a walk in your lunch break.

## 3. STRESS

When you are stressed or anxious you stimulate your “fight or flight” mechanisms in the body.

This releases a hormone that makes you more aware of any pain stimulus and greatly amplifies those signals.

This means that stressful situations can have an exaggerated pain response even to something non-threatening.

Could your neck pain be related to an upcoming deadline at work, pressure at home or recent emotional event?

**H**ave you had neck pain when you think you’ve done little to cause it? And if you’ve had a massage to release the tension around your neck, why does it always return?

Neck pain is a common ailment that I assess, be it a random short-term acute pain, or an ongoing ache. In this article I run through what I consider to be the top 5 causes for neck pain.

## 1. POSTURE

Even though there is little evidence that there is a perfect posture, what we do know is holding an unsupported position for a long period can cause muscle fatigue. In the clientele we treat at PhysioMotion, we have found that there’s a huge correlation between neck pain and the number of hours spent on a computer or mobile device.

It is similar to carrying a shopping bag home by your side; after a while you want to change hands as the muscles get tired. There are some common ways to immediately reduced this pain in sitting:



A relaxed and supported posture.



A posture that will overload your muscles.

Your neck pain may actually be your body providing a physical output for this increased mental stress.

Our body’s response is to tense our muscles during these stressful times, and due to their close affinity to our neck, tight shoulders can cause localised neck pain and discomfort.

By finding strategies to manage your stress levels this can alleviate your neck pain. This could be with exercise, meditation or speaking to a therapist.

## 4. YOUR THORACIC AREA AND SHOULDERS

Your neck pain can be caused by referred pain due to change in muscle tension connected to your neck.

This can result in tension headaches or migraine-like symptoms that are replicated by pressing a certain point on their back.

These can increase the sensitivity and shortening throughout the spinal and shoulder muscles which radiate up into the neck, which can be an indication of weakness. A strengthening and flexibility programme for back and shoulders can improve this pain.

## 5. OTHER MECHANICAL CAUSES

A traumatic event that can cause whiplash or a blow to the neck may result in neck pain.

The surrounding structures, muscles and connective tissues in the neck are usually stressed from the impact, and can take different amounts of time to settle down depending on the type of tissue and the extent that it has been damaged. In these situations, get advice as to the best treatment.

*Disclaimer: If you have ongoing neck pain with symptoms such as persistent dizziness, double vision, facial numbness, associated nausea, difficulty swallowing/speaking, or fainting, you should have yourself immediately assessed by a healthcare practitioner.*

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