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## Neck and Shoulder Pain from Improper Work Habits

Neck and shoulder pain is a common ailment for those who spend hours a day at a computer, caused by one or more of the following factors: monitor position, document position, telephone use, mouse use and sitting position. This article will address monitor position and mouse usage issues.

Depending on several factors, your head can weigh anywhere from 8-15 pounds. Imagine you rested your elbow on a table and had your arm pointing up with a bowling ball, the weight of your head, in the hand. If that bowling ball is balanced in your hand, you could easily sit there for a few minutes and have a conversation. But if you tilted the bowling ball several inches to one side, from holding that weight, the muscles would immediately begin to tire, hurt, and you would soon have to put it down. You may have arm pain that lasts hours.

The same scenario applies to your head. If it is directly over your body while you are working at the computer, all the neck, shoulder and upper back muscles are at rest. But if your head is tilted forward a few inches, like the bowling ball in the example above, all of the muscles in the back of your neck, upper back, and shoulders are constantly working to hold your head from falling forward.

If these muscles constantly contract:

- they become tense and inflamed which causes pain in the muscles
- they become shortened and restrict or alter movement in the bones of the neck which they attach to, possibly pinching nerves. This causes pain in the neck and traveling into the shoulders and arms
- the tight muscles pull on the back/base of the skull. This leads to the pain of a headache at the back of the head
- the muscles, from working constantly become fatigued so your head feels heavy

Your monitor position will unconsciously put your head in a position when you look at the screen. If it is too low, too high, or off to the side, your neck muscles are constantly working and you will have tension, pain and fatigue. If the monitor is in the correct position, **for you**, you will feel good, have more energy, get more work done with less mistakes, and prevent injury.

### Shoulder Pain: Causes and Preventions

There is a common type of shoulder pain that results from any activity that has you

reaching out and up like ironing, playing volleyball or when you have your mouse positioned off to the side, causing you to reach for it.

When you frequently reach up and out, the ball and socket joint in your shoulder rubs on the top of the socket. If this is done often (as you do daily working on a computer with a poorly placed mouse), the irritation of the bones rubbing on each other causes a little bone spur to grow. Then, when it gets big enough, the bone spur rubs slightly on the rotator cuff tendon which is just below it. Eventually, that rubbing irritates the tendon and there is pain. Most people just live with it and the rubbing eventually causes a tear in the tendon. Now you have disabling pain that limits many of your activities, makes working on the computer painful or impossible, and can only be fixed by surgery.

The prevention is simple and free. Just position your computer equipment and mouse so your arms are relaxed at your side, you have a slightly open angle at the elbow, and your wrists are straight. If you do this you will have no pain and prevent medical problems.