



Physical Therapy & Wellness

The Newsletter About Caring for Your Health



IS HOLIDAY STRESS CAUSING YOUR NECK PAIN?

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IS HOLIDAY STRESS CAUSING YOUR NECK PAIN?

We love the holidays, but they often add more stress to our already stressful lives. You might be suffering from stress-related neck pain, tension headaches, or even dizziness (or vertigo). During times of stress, your head moves into a forward-head posture and your neck and shoulder muscles tighten. This can become a vicious cycle as the combination of stress and gravity pulls you into a poor posture that you can't get out of.

THE 3 TYPES OF STRESS THAT CAN CAUSE NECK PAIN

First, there are mechanical stressors like poor posture that result in misalignment of our body. This can be caused by driving, time on electronics, looking down, sleeping in the wrong position, and inactivity. Your head weighs 40-45 pounds and once it's moved forward away from proper alignment (away from your shoulders), gravity will work against you. And your neck and shoulder muscles have to work extra hard to support that bowling ball head.

Second, emotional stress from the holidays is a very real thing. That fight or flight response puts all our muscles into a very tense state. If that tension is abnormally prolonged, like during the holidays, the muscles become overworked, will spasm, tighten, and shorten to excessively pull on your neck structures causing tension and pain.

Third, is physiological stress. In the fight or flight state, your body is in survival mode, diverting all resources for healing to supporting the production of cortisol, your stress hormone. This is useful when it's temporary, but being caught in a prolonged state of

stress-induced inflammation can have both physical and emotional effects. That's why some of us feel like we are in a frenzy, short tempered, exhausted but can't sleep, or for some people, this keeps your body from healing. During these busy times is when we forget to drink enough water and grab take out, so further adding to the inflammation in our bodies.

3 QUICK AND SIMPLE THINGS TO HELP WITH NECK PAIN

1. Support your body mechanically. Since posture and muscle tension is causing neck pain, the natural thing is to improve posture and manage muscle tension. This can be done with gentle dynamic stretches. The dynamic part is important because if you stretch too far and too long, you can over stretch. We want slow, gentle movements that increase blood flow to the tight tissues. Gentle movements slowly warm up the area to help the tissues relax and lengthen, as well as bring nutrients and take inflammation away from the area. Some people need extra tissue work, postural work, and a core strengthening program. We've included a couple of stretches for your neck and shoulder, but make an appointment with our physical therapists if you need more help.

2. Support your body physiologically and nutritionally. It's easy to get caught up in the hustle and bustle of the Holidays. Your nutrition doesn't have to be complicated, but you may need to be a little more intentional. Make sure you are drinking enough water. The right amount of water for each person varies, but the starting recommendation is 50% of your body weight in ounces.

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Physical Therapy For The Neck And Shoulder

For example, if you weigh 120, drink 60 ounces of water. And add a pinch of sea salt to add electrolytes. Your body actually uses more magnesium and zinc during times of stress. This is also the time to have some extra protein and fats to support your stress and immune systems. I like to have extra beef jerky in my purse on long shopping days so I don't get the cookies or fries at the food court. Eating excess sugar can contribute to inflammation and excess cortisol.

3, Support your body emotionally by trying these breathing exercises. Emotions can be high during the holidays. Stress is everywhere from work, family, school, friends and so on. We can't always control what goes on around us, but simply learning how to breathe helps turn off the sympathetic nervous system, and TURN ON the parasympathetic system to help manage stress and healing. I'll share my secret, simple and very effective breathing technique that I teach my patients. It's called nasal breathing from the book, *The Breathing Cure* by Patrick McKeown. You simply keep your mouth closed, slowly breathe in and slowly exhale. That's it! This triggers your relax and heal system, while producing nitric oxide that improves your immune system.

This was a very quick and cursory recommendation for neck pain. At G3 we can help customize a plan of care for your physical therapy and exercises to meet your individual needs. So please call us for an appointment if we can help make this a better holiday season for you.

Physiological Pain worsened by keeping your head in one place — like when you're driving, or using a laptop or desktop computer — is neck pain. While neck pain has a slew of symptoms, its major symptoms, reported by Mayo Clinic, are:

- Muscle tightness and spasms
- Headaches
- Decreased ability to move the head

Stress-induced neck pain is common, especially during the holidays. We have seen many ailments related to stress, including vertigo. At G3 Physical Therapy, we have been inundated in the past 4 months

treating stress-induced neck and shoulder pain, as well as dizziness and vertigo. Many experts think stress-induced neck pain is caused by physical factors — low, but constant, trapezius muscle activity. If your neck pain starts at the base of your shoulders, traveling upward, it may be poor posture or stress related.

CAUSES OF STRESS-RELATED NECK PAIN

While stress alone can trigger neck pain, a few factors can make it worse. Office environments tend to create neck pain problems — as they confine people to chairs, bad posture and little mobility. Driving often, too, can make your chances of stress-related neck pain higher.

The U.S. National Library of Medicine suggests contacting a professional if you're experiencing neck pain. Even if it's caused by stress, untreated neck pain might later reveal muscle spasms, arthritis, bulging discs or even narrowed spinal nerve openings.

HOW PHYSICAL THERAPY CAN HELP MY NECK PAIN

Neck pain, fortunately, can be alleviated with physical therapy. Because neck pain is often caused by activity, different activity can cure it. Sometimes, this "activity" means "no activity." Before you contact a professional, try reducing your neck movements. Sometimes, simply letting your neck muscles relax is enough.

If you don't see relief within two weeks, contact a professional. Physical therapists can target your pain's source by examining your symptoms. Then, they can offer exercises that stretch, flex and relax your neck muscles. In time, your neck will become more resilient — giving you the comfort you deserve. Where aftercare treatment is considered, custom-tailored neck exercises will assure your neck stays loose, limber and healthy.

If you're dealing with neck pain, you're not alone. Call our office today, and schedule an assessment. Even if your neck pain is caused by stress, it still needs attention. We'll work side by side with your goals, creating the proactive, effective programs you need to achieve mobility once more.



Exercise Essentials

Try This Exercise To Help Shoulder Pain

Step Through

1. Stand next to door frame with good posture, head looking straight ahead with your arm against the doorframe — have your forearm and bicep at a 90 degree angle from each other with your elbow tight to your body.
2. Step forward with the same side leg and lean into your shoulder.
3. Return to the starting position and repeat (x10).

Get Ready For The Carlsbad 5000 In 2023!

It's not too early to start training for the Carlsbad 5000 (<https://carlsbad5000.com>). Whether you are a newbie or a veteran runner with goals to get a better personal record.

There are 3 key things that should be included in a strategic plan to make your race successful and injury free. First, how to strategically progress mileage and speed. Second, how to support the extra stress and strain on your body with a strategic mobility, flexibility, and strength program. Third, how to support your body from the inside out with nutrition.

December is the perfect time to start planning for the Carlsbad 5000 and take advantage of the Early Bird Pricing! If you want to do a race, start running, but have a history of injury, or if you're not confident starting running on your own because of different aches and pains, call G3 Physical Therapy. We can help you with a plan.



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Holiday Recipe *Roasted Butternut Squash with Maple Sage Brown Butter*



PREP TIME: 10 MINUTES

COOK TIME: 20 MINUTES

TOTAL TIME: 30 MINUTES

SERVES 6

INGREDIENTS

- 1 medium butternut squash (peeled and cubed)
- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground pepper
- 2 tablespoons salted butter
- 10 fresh sage leaves
- 1 tablespoon grade A maple syrup (honey for SCD)
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

INSTRUCTIONS Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Peel, seed, and dice the butternut squash. You can follow my tutorial here. Toss the butternut squash in olive oil, salt, and pepper. Spread it evenly on a cookie sheet. Roast the squash, tossing occasionally, until tender and slightly browned, about 20 minutes. Heat the butter and sage leaves over medium-high heat, swirling it around the pan every couple of minutes. Once the butter foams up and starts browning, remove from heat. You want it to be a light amber color, but not burned. Add the maple syrup and cinnamon, then pour the butter sauce over the squash. Adjust the salt and pepper to your liking.

Recipe courtesy of Danielle Walker - AgainstAllGrain.com