

# A Pain in the Neck .....and Head .....and Shoulders

Severe headaches, migraines, neck discomfort, TMJ (jaw pain), shoulder instability or immobility.....many of us live with this pain, knowing no alternative. Yet I'm here to tell you that there are alternatives. To begin with, these discomforts are often the result of our current lifestyles: driving cars in endless commutes, hunching over our computers, talking on a phone with our heads tilted. An understanding of the actions that we do to create the pain is critical to alleviating it, and sometimes lifestyle changes can diminish or even eliminate the pain. However, it is counter posing for this lifestyle that will be most effective. This means understanding the misalignments that create pain, and then doing exercises to alleviate the misalignment/pain. Let me explain further.

The hunchback posture is a common upper body misalignment. Look at figure 1. The hunched posture is exaggerated in this figure to draw your attention to the misalignments. Notice the compression in the back of the neck: The vertebrae are compressed, not long and lengthened (figure 2) as they should be. The problem is that nerves come out of these cervical vertebrae. These nerves enervate the head, neck and shoulder regions. If the vertebrae are compressed, the muscles surrounding them are contracted. If the muscles are consistently contracted, nerve conduction (the nerves lie within the muscle tissue) is impeded, and blood flow (veins and arteries are also embedded in the muscle tissues) is impeded as well.

There are over thirty muscles in the face and head which power all of our facial expressions, pulling the mouth, eyes, forehead and cheeks. If nerve conduction or blood flow in these muscles is impeded, the result is headaches and facial pain. Lengthening the neck and freeing up the impeded nerves can relieve the pain. We need the head on straight!

Looking at the shoulder girdle in figure 1, you can see the upper arm bone (the humerus) is rotated in toward the front of the body, as if protecting the front side of the heart. Not only does this constrict all the muscles of the front side of the body, but it strains the muscles of the backside around the scapula (shoulder blade). It is not possible in this posture to use the strength of the upper back. So the daily activities (lifting, pushing,

carrying), end up being done by the small muscles of the upper arms and back (deltoid, teres major and minor, subscapularis, upper trapezius). With proper alignment of the body, the head of the humerus is rotated back, and the large upper back muscles (rhomboids, latissimus dorsi) take on the work. As they should.

Good alignment automatically reduces strain and strengthens the correct muscles. The following simple exercises will get you started on this path. Remember, the longer you have been living hunched up, the longer it will take to counter the posture and get rid of the aches and pains of the head, neck and shoulders. So be patient! The payoff will be huge.

If you would like personalized consultation or help with these issues, please contact Paola Feher at 586-7529 or [www.bozemanhealingarts.com](http://www.bozemanhealingarts.com)

*Paola Feher founded Bozeman Center for the Healing Arts in 1997 after receiving her master's degree in biomechanics. Her training emphasized observation of human bodies in motion, focusing on performance, injury prevention and rehabilitation. Paola is certified by the Yoga Alliance (E-RYT 500), is a licensed massage therapist (LMT), and specializes in the treatment of chronic pain and injury rehabilitation. Paola can be contacted at [www.bozemanhealingarts.com](http://www.bozemanhealingarts.com)*

**Fig. 1 Hunched Posture**      **Fig. 2 Better Posture**



**Fig. 3 neck lengtheners** - 3a: tilt the head to the side leaving the shoulders horizontal to the floor. This stretches the side muscles of the neck. Stay for 6-12 deep breaths and then switch sides. 3b: same as in 3a, then turn your chin down towards your armpit. This stretches the muscles of the back of the neck near the spine. Stay for 6-12 breaths and then switch sides.



**Fig. 4 opening the front side** - Place your forearms on a doorframe keeping your elbows at shoulder height, creating a 45 degree angle at the elbows. Begin to walk forward through the doorframe keeping your chin tucked in, stretching the muscles on the front of the chest area



**Fig. 6 postural realignment** - lying on the floor with your knees bent and your hands by your sides, lift your pelvis up on an inhale. Stay for a few breaths before coming down slowly on an exhale. Repeat 3-6 times.



**Fig. 5 strengthening the backside** - lying face down on the floor with your hands by your sides, raise the head, neck and shoulders up a few inches on an inhale. As you exhale, return to the starting position. For extra strength building, stay lifted for a few breaths before returning down.

