[IMAGE]

Sitting the Right Way

By Jeffrey Tucker, DC, DACRB

With so many people sitting in front of a computer all day long, plus time sitting while driving, and excessive time watching TV, learning how to sit properly and take 'microbreaks' to avoid muscular imbalances is vitally important.

One of the most simple 'microbreaks' to perform is to stand up, reach overhead with both arms/hands while pretending that you are climbing the rungs of a ladder with your hands. Perform this maneuver for 30 seconds every 30 minutes.

Generally, maintaining the normal spinal curves is considered to be beneficial during sitting; however a common tendency for most people, especially those sitting at computers with improper screen height is to assume a forward head posture (FHP) along with kyphosis of the thoracic spine. Forward head posture has been shown to increase the incidence of neck and shoulder trigger points and pain, along with alterations in shoulder muscle activity. As a result, individuals who regularly sit this way may be more prone to conditions like cervicoscapular injuries, scapulothoracic and shoulder impingement syndromes upon starting exercise programs if not properly assessed and corrected.

Poor posture while driving can produce a repetitive load to the tissues that causes sustained stress. Simply staying in the car seat with poor posture long enough will eventually ensure damage.

Sitting the Right Way - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Next time you are on the freeway, notice how many people drive with only one hand on top of the steering wheel. For example, notice that driving with the left hand on top of the steering wheel may make the left shoulder elevate. That could perpetuate trapezius and levator scapulae tightness on the left.

Unless you are holding the steering wheel at 9 and 3 o'clock or even lower, you are probably elevating and protracting the shoulder. With your hands in the proper position on the steering wheel, the thoracic spine, scapula and glenohumeral joint have a better chance of remaining in neutral.

I frequently find myself holding the wheel with my left and leaning my torso to the right because I rest my right arm on the center console. Prolonged sitting on the glutes can cause poor circulation and lack of oxygen to the tissue contributing to inhibition.

An example of a 'microbreak' for driving in the car is to squeeze the shoulder blades together for 20-30 seconds and then letting go and repeating 2-3 times. Other 'microbreaks' for driving can be performing cervical range of motion; perform shoulder retraction with elevation and depression. It is also good to use the 'fiddle factor' with the car seat by changing positions frequently (every 30 minutes) especially if you have electric seats.

Use this checklist for 'proper sitting' while driving a car or in your office:

- Sit up against the seatback with a tall spine.
- Adjust the seat pan length so you can permit a fist to pass between the front of the seat and the back of the upper calf.
- Adjust the back rest up and down to your comfort level. It should be placed firm against your back and may be tilted a bit backwards for more comfort.
- Adjust your hips so that they are level and square.
- Lightly draw your belly button in towards your spine.
- Lightly push the back of the head against the head rest while maintaining a level chin.
- Plant your left foot firmly on the floor and dead pedal.
- Lift the sternal notch.
- Slightly set the scapula by rolling them back and down, or back and up (depending on the clients neutral scapula position).
- Holding this good posture, reach your arms for the steering wheel at 3 and 9 o'clock or lower, and like I want you to be in life, 'keep your foot on the gas pedal'.

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