

Teens showing signs of 'text neck'

8 August 2016, by Vikki Ortiz Healy, Chicago Tribune

Think your kid's posture is starting to suffer from always looking down at a cellphone?

It is, according to a national chain of physical therapy clinics, which reports that more teens than ever are complaining of "text neck," or back and [neck pain](#) that can only be explained by the strain on the body caused by constant viewing of hand-held technology.

"We have teens experiencing the same shoulder, neck and back pain usually felt by people 30 years older," said Megan Randich, a physical therapist and facility manager for Athletico in Westchester, Ill. "They shouldn't be experiencing those issues."

Randich said spine specialists also are seeing evidence of strain from cellphone, tablet and laptop use in high school athletes who complain that they don't have the normal range of motion - or feel pain when trying to throw a baseball, strike a football stance or perform in other sporting activities.

The physical therapists' findings echo research published in 2014 in the National Library of Medicine, which warned that the extra weight - sometimes up to 60 pounds - on the cervical spine caused by looking down can lead to wear-and-tear on the spine, degeneration and even surgery.

Elaina Towns, a mother of three in Palatine, Ill., said she and her husband routinely try to enforce rules to limit their kids' screen time, and thus, strain on their bodies. The family doesn't allow technology use during dinner or at family gatherings. By 10:30 p.m. all electronics must be docked in a charging station and remain off all night, she said.

Still, Towns said she thinks all young people growing up in this era are at risk for text neck.

"I have kids who are very active and not plugged in all the time, but nonetheless, I completely believe that this could have an effect on this generation moving forward," she said. "They don't

talk on the phone, for starters, so all their communication through peers is through texting. They're not even picking up their heads."

Athletico, the Oak-Brook, Ill.,-based company with 350 clinics across the U.S., is so concerned about the prevalence of text neck that it has produced a list of stretches and exercises teens may do to correct the damage and improve damaged tissue.

The exercises include:

- Shoulder Blade Squeeze: Pinch your shoulder blades back behind you, working to touch your elbows. Once back as far as you can go, hold the position for 5 seconds before relaxing. Repeat 20 to 30 times.

- Neck Stretch: Sit up tall with your head held high. Pull chin toward your chest, creating a double chin, and hold this position for 5 seconds. Repeat this 20 to 30 times.

- Chest Stretch: Stand in the middle of a doorway and hold both ends of the door frame. Lean forward until you feel a stretch. Hold this position for 5 seconds and repeat 20 to 30 times.

Randich added that another way for teens to combat text neck: Get outside and be active.

"Before this generation, there was so much more outdoor free play," she said. "Activities used to counter any poor posture or positioning. They're no longer doing that."

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