

YOUR HEALING KNEADS

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Member, Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals

Is Your Vision Causing Muscle Tension?

Mary Betts Sinclair

Do you have tension headaches or chronic tension in your upper body? How about neck and shoulder stiffness? Maybe you experience strain in the temples, forehead, neck, shoulders, or back, especially after a long period of working at a computer or reading a book? If so, your tension could be related to how you look at the world.

Healthy vision is comfortable, efficient, and relaxed for the viewer, while poor visual habits can interfere with free and easy movement, making the body chronically tense. We use our eyes much of the day, and if we strain to see, we create tension in the face, neck, shoulders, and back muscles. Squinting and straining when we have trouble

few years of life. A lazy eye, for example, may cause a child to hike up one eye or one shoulder, or twist the neck to look out of the better-sighted eye at all times. Being sensitive to light might cause a child to develop the habit of hanging the head forward. Injuries to or near the eyes can also cause chronic tension in the muscles of the eyes or structures near the eyes. And finally, emotional stress can cause us to hold our muscles tight while we look out at the world.

What To Do

STEP ONE

Talk with your massage therapist about your pain and strain. During a session, your therapist can check you for extra

To know what you know and what you do not know, that is true knowledge.

-Confucius



Poor visual habits can interfere with free and easy movement

making something out, or stiffening our entire neck, spine, and pelvis every time we look up can affect the entire body.

Most of us develop these vision habits without even being aware of them, but there are other health factors that can play a role. Up to 5 percent of children are born with some kind of visual abnormality, or develop one in the first

tension in and around the eyes, neck, and shoulders, then fine-tune massage techniques to help relieve your discomfort. Relaxation exercises, as well as hot and cold packs, can offer additional relief.

STEP TWO

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Office Hours and Contact

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Do daily eye muscle stretches, practice self-massage, and use hot and cold packs over your eyes. Your massage therapist can show you how to use these easy, inexpensive aids.

STEP THREE

Your bodyworker may also refer you to another health-care professional who can help you reduce built-up tension. For example, a behavioral optometrist can check to make sure your glasses are the right prescription and help you learn better visual habits; a Feldenkrais practitioner can help you change old habits, see with less strain, and understand how emotional stress might be affecting your eyes; and an ergonomic expert can help adapt your office workstation so that it protects and does not strain your eyes.

Relief for Computer Users

According to the American Optometric Association, 46 percent of Americans spend at least 5 hours a day on a computer or smartphone. When looking at a screen, many people hold their head forward of center and slouch, which puts many upper-body muscles in a shortened position. These visual habits are now creating whole-body strain. In addition to head-forward posture, prolonged twisting of the head can tighten muscles in the back of the neck. At the computer, the greater the glare, the smaller the font size, and the poorer the resolution, the more likely it is that the person will strain to see and develop tightness in the upper shoulders.

Here are some ways to avoid pain and strain:

Computer users tend to blink very little and stare straight ahead, not using their peripheral vision. Be sure to keep blinking, which washes your eyes in naturally therapeutic tears and breaks up your stare.

Take frequent rest breaks using the 20-20 Rule: every 20 minutes, spend 20 seconds looking at something far away, preferably gazing out a window. Also, stand up and move as much as possible. This is a great time to do eye-muscle stretches and range-of-motion exercises for your back and neck. Use your fingertips to gently massage around your eyes, temples, and

forehead. Finally, rub your palms together and gently cup your closed eyes. Relax and breathe freely.

Make sure you have good light, and check that your monitor is the correct distance away from your eyes and at the right height. Also, adjust the screen settings to where they are comfortable in terms of resolution and flicker.

If you wear eyeglasses, have them checked. For example, in order for some people to see clearly with their heads held in an upright and balanced position, without chronic tightness in the back of the neck, they may need to have a prescription for a longer focal length or larger bifocal inserts, or have an adjustment of their eyeglass frames if they are bent or twisted. Some people may need a stronger or weaker prescription. If your doctor has prescribed a pair of glasses specifically

for seeing the computer screen, wear them.

Mary Betts Sinclair is an Oregon-based educator and bodyworker. Learn more about her at www.marybettssinclair.com.



Your massage therapist can check for tension

Footprints for Health

You walk on them all day, but did you know your feet do more than carry you from one place to the next? They also have a unique connection to balanced health and well-being. In a form of bodywork known as reflexology, the feet are said to contain reflex areas that mirror and connect to all parts of the body--and pressure on these points can actually influence your state of health.

Reflexology is viewed primarily as a stress reduction or relaxation technique. Using the thumb, finger, and hand, gentle pressure is applied to reflex areas of the feet in order to decrease stress and bring the body into equilibrium.

Although simplistic in application, the effects of the treatment can be profound. Through activation of nerve receptors in the hands and feet, new messages flood into the body system, changing its tempo and tone. In essence, the foot or hand becomes a conduit for sharing information throughout the body. Function in the connecting area is

improved and, at the same time, the body experiences overall relaxation and benefits to the circulation and elimination systems. When the body's systems are at optimal functioning, self-healing is enhanced.

Scientific studies have documented the benefits of reflexology for a variety of ailments, ranging from reduction of pain, improvement in circulation, and release of tension, to improved effectiveness of medication, as well as benefits for diabetes and headaches.

In this sense, reflexology is not a medical treatment for specific symptoms or diseases, but rather a way to facilitate the body's inherent healing power.



Treat your feet, and body, to reflexology.

The Scoop on Meditation

A Simple Practice with Profound Benefits

People who meditate regularly appear internally and externally five to 10 years younger than their non-meditating peers, according to author Deepak Chopra. That's good news for the estimated 10 million people who practice meditation on an ongoing basis and experience the resulting calm it cultivates.

The rich benefits come from doing something that looks like nothing: Sitting still, being quiet, and breathing deeply. Meditation works simply but profoundly by defusing the onslaughts of life - a racing mind, busyness, deadlines, commutes, all of which have physiological effects on well-being. Meditation calms the nervous system, decreases metabolic rate, heart rate, and blood pressure, and lowers levels of cholesterol, stress hormones, and free

radicals. It also has a direct effect on breathing, slowing and deepening respiration so more oxygen circulates throughout the body. Not only that, meditation is said to lessen feelings of anxiety and depression and improve memory and concentration. And all of this culminates in slowing the aging process, as Chopra notes.

There are many meditation techniques, including focusing on a mantra, a sacred word or phrase, or your breath. But the basic intent of all meditation is focus and attention. And it doesn't take hours a day in an ashram to meditate effectively. Benefits kick in with even a short period of devoted time.

How to begin? Wear comfortable, unrestrictive clothes, sit on a cushion or chair with your back straight (think once

again, comfort), rest your hands on your legs, let your eyes go soft and out of focus or close them, breathe slowly and deeply, and - the hardest part - attempt to empty your mind of thoughts and quiet the internal dialogue. When thoughts flit through your mind, let them pass without judging them and come back to your focus (your mantra, counting, etc.) and breathing.

Start with this sitting meditation technique for five minutes a day, and add on time as you get more at ease with the process. For more information on techniques and benefits, check out www.abc-of-meditation.com.

*What you do
today can
improve all your
tomorrows.*

-Ralph Marston

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