

# YOUR HEALING KNEADS

NOV 2019

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

*I find, when you're an optimist, life has a funny way of looking after you.*

-Simon Sinek



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

**Knead For Healing Therapeutic Massage**  
**Barbara Khan, LMT**  
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**[www.kneadforhealing.massagetherapy.com](http://www.kneadforhealing.massagetherapy.com)**

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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](http://www.marybettssinclair.com).*



Your massage therapist can check for tension

# Why Buy Organic?

## Is the Higher Price Worth It?

While shopping in your grocery store's produce section, you may notice the organically grown apples are pocked and not as big and perfectly round as the conventional produce, but they are more expensive. What's the difference, and which do you choose? Your decision may significantly impact not only your health but the health of the planet and the economy.

### DEFINING "ORGANIC"

Organic foods are derived from sustainable farming practices that maintain and replenish soil fertility without the use of toxic pesticides and fertilizers. These foods are minimally processed and do not include artificial ingredients or preservatives. On the other hand, conventional farms often rely heavily on pesticides, genetic modification, synthetic hormones, and antibiotics.

### DOES IT REALLY MATTER?

To understand the fallout of conventional farming is to realize the

argument for organics. Bob Scowcroft, executive director of the Organic Farming Research Foundation, touches on the devastating consequences of pesticides. "DDT nearly eliminated the American eagle by affecting their ability to reproduce" he says. "Since World War II, we've introduced more than 9,000 chemicals into the environment. And we don't know the full impact on humans and different sized humans," he adds, alluding to studies revealing damaging effects on children.

When you buy organically certified foods, you're ensured they are free of pesticides, hormones, antibiotics, and genetic DNA modification.

"Organics are better for the environment, and it's an investment in the revitalization of rural America," Scowcroft says. Organic farms are usually smaller, family-owned farms contributing to the economy of struggling rural America, he explains. The organic choice may be a little more

expensive, but it's an investment in your health and the future.



Organic foods are free of pesticide residue.

# The Scoop on Sugar

## Not Such a Sweet Story

*Shelley Burns, N.D.*

Most people have no idea just how much sugar is in the foods Americans consume. However, this sweet culprit may be behind many health issues, including skin problems. Here's why.

When refined carbohydrates, otherwise known as simple sugars, are consumed in excess, they cause an increase in blood sugar levels. This excess sugar (glucose) attaches itself to proteins and is referred to as glycosylation. All cells in our bodies have a protein component to them including our hormones, enzymes, cholesterol, and immune cells. As proteins become coated with glucose, they are unable to work effectively.

Collagen, that vital component of a glowing complexion, makes up 40 percent of the proteins in the body. Glycosylation hastens protein

cross-linking, which weakens collagen. The result: wrinkles.

But wait, there's more. Sugar also causes an increase in levels of cortisol, the stress hormone, which can interfere with hormonal balance and increase inflammation. Skin inflammation can manifest as acne, puffiness under the eyes, and eczema. Sugar also increases insulin levels and reduces sensitivity of insulin. In fact, research shows people with acne process sugar poorly, which could be a direct result of high cortisol and high insulin levels in the blood.

And finally, sugar depletes the necessary nutrients required to keep the immune system healthy. For example, sugar interferes with the way the body uses vitamin C, which is needed for the formation of collagen and elastin as well

as immunity. It can also lead to sluggish digestion, which also affects the skin.

The best way to steer clear of sugar is to read labels. Avoid products that list sugar in the first three ingredients, and be aware of words ending in "ose" such as sucrose, dextrose, and maltose, all of which are sugar indicators. Also avoid processed foods and refined carbohydrates, such as white flour, white rice, and white potatoes.

Whenever the sweet allure of sugar tempts you, remember, sugar-free is key to beauty.

*Be thankful for  
what you have;  
you'll end up  
having more. If  
you focus on  
what you don't  
have, you will  
never, ever have  
enough.*

*-Oprah Winfrey*

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