



# Body Awareness Physical Therapy

## The Body Beat

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### How is my arm pain caused by my neck?

**P**atients are sometimes surprised to learn that the pain in their arm or hand originates from their neck. In fact, there are many patients that come to physical therapy with some pain in the arm and hand that originates in the neck, but they have no history of neck pain.

There are several reasons why conditions of the neck can cause upper limb pain. The most common reason for this is due to radiculopathy. The neck is the upper aspect of the spinal column and through this region passes the spinal cord, which is a conglomerate of multiple nerves. At each level of the spinal cord, specific nerves branch off that travel from the brain, down the arm to very specific locations. If

there is any damage or irritation to any of these nerves, the pain will travel down the arm along the distribution of that nerve.

The second most common reason why arm pain originates in the neck is due to referred pain. Referred pain is when a painful condition in one region of the body represents itself in another part of the body. A good analogy to remember is that people often complain of shoulder pain when they suffer a heart attack. In a similar way, pain located in the neck can sometimes represent itself in other parts of the body.

The major difference between referred pain and radicular pain is that with referred pain the pain does not necessarily travel along the distribution of a

#### What's Inside?

Q'n'A.....	2
Graduate of the Month.....	2
Community Corner.....	3
Healthy Hints.....	4

nerve.

These are just two examples of how pain in the arm can originate in the neck, but there are multiple conditions affecting the neck that can manifest themselves in other parts of the body. However, each of these conditions of the neck have many different causes of pain. Some of the more common causes include poor posture, improper desk ergonomics, injury to the neck, and arthritis.

Due to the complexity of the neck region, adequate time and effort should be allowed for a thorough assessment. Each assessment of arm pain should include the potential interaction between these parts of the body.

## Q'N'A

Your questions answered by the Licensed Physical Therapists of Body Awareness Physical Therapy.

**Q:** Why is posture so important for my neck?

**A:** Posture is important for the neck, primarily due to the inherent mobility of the neck. This mobility is important because it allows you to position the head so that you can see, hear, eat, etc. The neck lacks the bony stability that you see in other parts of the body, such as the hip. Therefore, the neck is very mobile and relies on muscles to help correct posture. But, if you slouch or have poor posture, then gravity pulls your head forward and the muscles of the neck must prevent the head from falling forward. Therefore, poor posture positions the joints of the neck in unfavorable positions, placing stress in the joints as well as the supporting muscles.

**Q:** I was given the diagnosis of DDD. What does this mean?

**A:** DDD is short for degenerative disk disease, which is a normal occurrence as we age. DDD is a natural degenerative process that leads to some loss of height of the disks between the bones of the spine. This process can occur in any part of the spine, but is more common in the neck or the low back. The decreased disk height can lead to decreased motion of the joint and increased stress on the other joints of the spine. DDD affects some people earlier in life for various reasons, such as previous injury to that region of the spine, genetic predisposition, and various unknown reasons. There is not a direct correlation between the extent of degeneration and pain, however, the structural alterations can lead to pain.

# Body Awareness Graduate of the Month

Graduate of the Month: Diane Olcott

Diane Olcott was initially seen by our therapists in mid-July after she sustained a fall that resulted in fracturing her knee cap. After enduring 6 weeks of intense rehabilitation, she was able to improve her functional mobility and strength so that she could walk without pain and return to her prior level of function. Diane's progress went so well that she was able



to vacation in New York with her husband by the end of her treatment. Diane's success can be attributed to her dedication to attending all of her scheduled therapy visits and to her compliance with performing the home exercise program she was given. Body Awareness would like to congratulate Diane as being our Graduate of the Month!

# Community Corner

Here's a success story from one of our Costa Mesa patients, Claudia S.

Claudia writes, "For the first time, as long as I can remember, at least since the age of 13, I am able to walk, sit and stand up straight... I have learned how to exercise so that I can better maintain good posture." Claudia walked into our clinic with problems of neck pain which was attributable to her posture. After trying three other physical therapy clinics, Claudia was able to achieve the results that she was looking for: no pain, better postural awareness and a new outlook on how physical exercise goes a long way in maintaining good health.

Other patient results from Costa Mesa

"When I first started physical therapy, I could barely get into my side pocket— let alone my hip pocket. I now can reach into my hip pocket painlessly."

"After my knee surgery in June, I began attending physical therapy and I was able to walk up the stairs without pain and without feeling like I was going to fall over!"

Here's a few quotes from our San Clemente patients

"My shoulder is better than it was one and a half weeks ago. Less painful to do certain activities like closing the car door and blow drying my hair."

"Less pain! Can raise my arm better, not totally yet. Vacuumed carpet with little trouble today."

"I am on the path! I can actually jump a little. Also, I am walking without too much pain. Stairs are getting a lot better than before. Feeling stronger and more confident with each treatment."

Have a question for our **Q'N'A** column or a suggestion on what you would like to see in the Body Awareness *Body Beat*?

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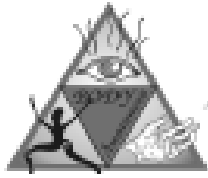
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## **Healthy Hints**

### **What should my posture be while I sleep?**

- Keep your neck supported whether you are a back or side-sleeper.
- Most people only need to use one pillow, most commonly of medium density.
- Try to sleep on your back, unless you have a condition that limits lying in this position.
- If you sleep on your side, put a pillow between your knees to protect your back.