

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

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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*Knowing others is wisdom;
Knowing the self is enlightenment.*

-Tao Te Ching

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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

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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

Put Your Best Face Forward

Tess Mauricio

You might be surprised at what can speed up your skin's aging process. Following are several ways to ensure you continue to put your best face forward.

AVOID DRINKING THROUGH STRAWS

I'm sure many of you drink dark sodas, tea, and coffee through a straw to prevent staining your pearly whites or avoid putting your mouth on a can or bottle, right? Unfortunately, it's causing fine lines around your mouth, a sign of premature aging.

TRAIN YOURSELF TO SLEEP ON YOUR BACK

Resting your face on the pillow in the same way every night for years leads to wrinkles, which eventually become etched on the surface of the skin and no longer disappear the next morning.

PULL DOWN THE SHADE IN AN AIRPLANE

You're much closer to the sun in a plane than on land, and ultraviolet (UV) rays, which can penetrate windows, are more intense at higher altitudes. Pilots and flight attendants have been found to be

at an increased risk for melanoma and other skin cancers.

BEWARE BEAUTY CREAMS WITH TOXIC INGREDIENTS

Exposure to some beauty cream chemicals does more harm than good. Know your ingredients and consult with your skin care professional to make the best possible product selections. Some experts caution against the use of creams that contain dimethicone, mineral oil, parabens, paraffin, and petrolatum.

CLEAN GLASSES AND SUNGLASSES

Bacteria on the eyeglass frame will sit directly on your face for an extended period of time. Simply wipe clean with an antibacterial cloth each day.

WASH AWAY CHLORINE

After a dip in the pool or hot tub, wash your face with a cleanser to remove all chemical residues, and be sure to moisturize afterward.

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owner/operator of multiple cosmetic dermatology centers throughout Southern California. She is currently a fellow of the American Board of Dermatology, and diplomate of the American Academy of Dermatology. Learn more online at www.scrippsderm.com.



Wash your face to remove residue.

Secrets of Sleep

Jed Heneberry

We've all heard it before: get your eight hours of sleep and watch your life improve. But the reason we've all heard it is because it's true, and research keeps showing the importance of sleep and its variety of health benefits.

The National Sleep Foundation says there is no "magic number" of hours for optimum sleep benefits, but that different age groups, and even different individuals, need different amounts of sleep. General recommendations are 7-8 hours per night for adults, while children often need 10-11 hours. Getting less than what you need has been linked to an increased risk of diabetes, heart problems, psychiatric conditions, and more.

Here's a quick look at some new findings that reveal the secrets of sleep, and also

how to get more of it.

- Sleep Suppresses Appetite: Just one night of sleep loss can increase brain activity in the region that contains appetite sensation in response to food images, increasing the long-term possibility of becoming overweight. "Lack of Sleep Makes Your Brain Hungry," *The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology Metabolism*.

- Naps for Your Noggin: The right side of the brain, which is generally associated with creativity, is active during so-called power naps, while the left brain remains mostly quiet. While it is not clear what exactly is happening during these brief rest periods, researchers suspect the brain is conducting important memory tasks. "'Power Naps' May Boost Right-Brain

Activity," *Health.com*.

- Cherry on Top: Drinking tart cherry juice increased melatonin in study participants, improving sleep efficiency, quality, and time. "Effect of Tart Cherry Juice on Melatonin Levels and Enhanced Sleep Quality," *European Journal of Nutrition*.

*Focus on the
positive in your
life, for what
you focus on
increases.*

-Author Unknown

WELCOME SPRING! Time for planting new seeds, exercising your body, adding outdoor activities and enjoying your family and friends. Massage has obviously shown you the benefits, so please share your massage experience with those who may need to release their stress and tension too. Enjoy this refreshing season! Best Wishes, Julia

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