



May  
2007

Client handout courtesy of Certified Professional Trainers Network, CPTN e-News

PLACE YOUR NAME AND CONTACT INFO HERE

## Dealing with upper back tightness or "knots"\*

When your upper back feels as if it has "knots" in it, you may be experiencing upper-trapezius strain, a common "repetitive strain injury" (RSI) of the upper back. A repetitive strain injury (RSI) occurs when too much stress or strain is repeatedly placed on a joint or musculoskeletal tissue. In the case of tightness in the upper trapezius, causes could be linked to prolonged use of the computer or the telephone over extended periods of time, or to participation in recreational or sports activities. The upper trapezius muscles are a large pair of triangular muscles that you can feel at the back of your neck and top of your shoulders. They move the head and the shoulder blades. Tightness and tenderness can result from simple everyday activities that occur over and over again (for example, cradling a telephone between your ear and shoulder). Targeting the strength of these and related muscles can be undertaken with the help of a personal trainer.

The following simple exercises should help with upper-trapezius tightness in your work situation.

*Sitting with upright posture, perform 15-20 repetitions of each of the following exercises every hour that you are at a desk.*

### 1. Shoulder blade (scapula) pinches

Roll the shoulders back and pinch the shoulder blades together. (Repeat 15-20 times)

### 2. Shoulder shrugs

Raise the shoulders up toward the ears, then slowly lower them back down, avoiding "dropping" the shoulders. (Repeat 15-20 times)

### 3. Neck side-bending

Tilt one ear toward the shoulder and hold briefly. (Repeat 15-20 times) Repeat on the opposite side for 15-20 repetitions.

### 4. Neck rotation.

Look over one shoulder, and pause briefly in that position. Repeat movement on the opposite side. (Repeat to each side 15-20 times)

If you feel any tightness or soreness in the upper trapezius after performing the above rotation exercise, do 1-3 repetitions of the following static stretch. Hold each repetition for 30 seconds.

### 5. Neck side-bending/rotation stretch

- In a standing or seated position, place the right hand on top of the head and let the left arm rest at the side.
- **Gently** press the head toward the right shoulder with the right hand.
- While the head is still in the side-bending position, rotate the chin down toward the shoulder so that you are looking at your right hip. (The stretch should be felt on the left side of the neck/shoulder area. If the neck were a square column, the stretch would be felt in the opposite back corner.)
- Make certain to keep the both shoulders pressed downwards away from the ears.
- Repeat on the opposite side. (1-3 repetitions on each side for 30 seconds each).

If your shoulders tend to round forward, you can improve this condition by practising the scapular pinch and by having your personal trainer show you a chest (pectoral) stretch and well as back-strengthening exercises.

*\*Inspired by and modified from an article in IDEA Fitness Journal, [Helping Fitness Pain](#), Sept, 2006, p.115.*