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OPINION COLUMN

Position yourself for pain-free posture

Melissa Carr, 24 hours

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(FOTOLIA)

As summer holidays come to an end, many people are now back to spending hours hunched over a keyboard, pounding out letters and numbers, slouched over a steering wheel in rush-hour traffic and stooped under the weight of heavy backpacks full of books.

With such activities conducive to poor posture comes upper-back and neck-tension pain. The average head weighs about the same as a 10-pin bowling ball, so the neck and upper-back muscles need to work hard to keep it in a forward position. This poor posture leads to tension, pain, numbness, tingling and fatigue.

Check out your posture now. While keeping the chin parallel with the floor, pull the head back over the spine. Roll the shoulders up, back, and then down, bringing the shoulder blades a bit closer to each other. Take deep, slow breaths and feel the muscles relax.

Determine if there are items in your environment that are contributing to pain. Ergonomics is used to improve the fit between the user, the equipment (chairs, desks and computers, among others), and the surroundings.

Does a stack of books under your feet feel more comfortable? Perhaps your chair is too high. Do you need to twist to see your monitor

or use your mouse? Can your car seat be repositioned for better comfort? Can pillows and props improve things further? Backpacks have two shoulder straps for good reason; use them. If a backpack is heavy and has a hip and chest strap, use those too. A heavy purse can often be cleaned out so that less strain is placed on one shoulder.

Movement is key. We weren't made to endure sitting marathons. Yet, many sit for more than eight hours daily, with few breaks. Time to get up and move and stretch.

For an opportunity to rest and get treatment, try acupuncture. Acupuncture for neck and upper-back pain relaxes tight muscles, improves circulation and reduces stress to relieve tension, pain, headaches, fatigue, and weakness. Such symptoms are amongst the most common reasons patients seek out acupuncture treatment.

Chinese herbs might also be prescribed to treat pain, inflammation, and muscle spasms. These may include turmeric, ginger, bai shao, yan hu suo or tao ren. Magnesium supplements, or foods rich in magnesium such as legumes, almonds and dark leafy greens, can also help reduce muscle tension.

While upper back and neck pain are common, it is avoidable.

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