

Do You Make These 3 Ergonomic Mistakes When Sitting at Your Desk?

With the number of people sitting for countless hours, it no wonder that we are seeing a increase in the number of numbness and tingling otherwise known as peripheral neuropathy. Peripheral Neuropathy (PN) is a term that describes the disorder of your peripheral nervous system. Your peripheral nervous system contains nerves in your arms, legs, face, and trunk. There are many causes of neuropathy, or the strange sensations, that someone experiences.

One common ailment occurs with compression or compromise of tissue and eventually nerves. Another common condition is the lack of proper motion in the surrounding joints and muscles. Joints, muscles, and the surrounding soft tissue are designed in a way to maintain integrity of proper physiology. When disruption occurs, different signs and symptoms such as numbness and tingling can be present. Let us look at the three mistakes made when sitting at a desk.

- **Not sitting in your chair properly** – people sit at chairs that are not conducive to proper posture. Sitting in a chair that does not have proper support can lead to abnormal biomechanics of the spine. When the curvature of the spine (lordotic curve) is compromised, an alteration in nerve function will begin to express as numbness or tingling. Many times, people will talk about experiencing sciatica, feet numbness or feeling asleep. To avoid this, a good lumbar support is necessary. Your feet should be on the floor, not crossed, with a 90 bend at the knee and hip. Too much or too little flexion can result in abnormal muscle tightness with unwanted strain and pressure on the lower back. Finally, make sure that your chair is at the proper height for your desk. You may need to use a stool to place your feet upon if too short. Having your arms at the wrong height can put extra pressure on your shoulder, compromising biomechanics of the back and shoulder.
- **Sitting at your desk too long** – It is important to get up and move. Set a timer every 30 to 45 minutes to remind you to get up and move around. As your body tires, supporting musculature will begin to fatigue. An indication of this is known when you start to feel trigger points in the upper part of your back. When muscles of the neck get tired, your head will begin to move forward resulting in extra pressure and demand on the supporting muscles. With the abnormal posture, compromise of the nerves in the neck can eventually lead to numbness, tingling or shooting pains in the arm. Just as athletes train to strengthen areas of their body for long periods of exertion, you should train and strengthen supporting muscles of your neck and back. For some people, they spend 8 to 10 hours per day at a desk expecting their neck, back, and shoulders to stay in the game and not tire. It is absurd to think that muscles can endure this amount pressure almost everyday. By training, you will not only be proactive, but also may reduce or eliminate numbness, tingling, and pain.
- **Having the computer too low** – With the amount of hours spent at a computer. People often find themselves with forward head posture looking at the computer screen. With strain placed on the eyes and neck, the change in biomechanics can lead to how the nerves transmit information. This is often seen on x-rays as people lose their curvature along with forward head posture and trigger points found in the back of the neck and shoulders. When sitting at your computer, you should place your screen to be slightly higher than eye level. You will find yourself upright without a forward head posture.

Remember that with ergonomic changes you need to consult with a professional about rehabilitating supporting muscles. Proper exercises should be given to strengthen the spine and reduce the load being placed on them. Numbness and tingling are often a result of poor posture, biomechanics, and compression of tissue surrounding the nerves. Along with ergonomic changes and rehab, an evaluation needs to be done, as there may be contributing factors than just the abovementioned.

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