

# YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE TO NECK & SHOULDER PAIN



...and how to treat it naturally, without  
painkillers or surgery

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*The information in this guide are not a replacement for the services of a healthcare professional. Please do not use this book to diagnose or treat a medical or health condition.*

*Always consult a physician or a licensed healthcare professional, such as a physical therapist, before starting an exercise plan. If an exercise is increasing your pain, please discontinue and consult a certified provider.*

*Call (239) 676-0546 to schedule a free Full Body Diagnostic with Bridging The Gap Physical Therapy.*



Let's not sugarcoat it: you're reading this report because you want to know the seven most common causes of neck and shoulder pain.

Here they are:

1. Bad sleeping position
2. Using old pillows
3. Poor posture
4. Texting (seriously!)
5. Sitting
6. Breathing wrong
7. Stress

But you aren't really reading this report because you want to know the seven most common causes of neck and shoulder pain. You're here because you (or someone you love) is suffering from neck and/or shoulder pain, and you're desperate for a solution. So let's dive in.

The authors of this report consist of the expert physical therapy team at Bridging The Gap Physical Therapy, where we are committed to helping you find that solution—naturally, and without dangerous surgeries, expensive weekly chiropractic bills, or addictive prescription drugs that do more harm than good. We have helped countless people discover the secret to finally living pain-free and returning to the active, independent lifestyles they deserve.

Our goal is to help active people stay fit, healthy, and mobile...without pain medications, injections, or surgery!

Contact Bridging The Gap Physical Therapy at  
[hello@bridgingthegappt.com](mailto:hello@bridgingthegappt.com) or (239) 676-0546 to book your first  
session—completely free of charge if you mention this guide!

## 1. BAD SLEEPING POSITION

Do you often wake up with a crick in your neck? It could be your sleeping position! The WORST thing you can do for your neck is sleep on your stomach—it puts your neck into extension.



*“Neck extension” refers to a neck that is stretched too far for a long period of time—for example, sleeping for eight hours with your head turned at a 90-degree angle*

As we age, the cervical spine undergoes a degenerative process. This is completely normal, but it also causes us to lose some of the range of motion that allows our necks to maintain extended positions. Sleeping with the neck extended will, therefore, cause a significant amount of pain, numbness, and tingling! Your body just isn’t meant to bend that way.

**The solution?** Try to avoid falling asleep on your stomach. It can be hard to retrain yourself, but your neck and shoulders will thank you!

## 2. USING OLD PILLOWS

Now, if you’re NOT a stomach sleeper, you’re not off the hook just yet. Neck/shoulder pain in back and side sleepers is often related to bedtime, too.

Let me ask you...when's the last time you bought a new pillow?

**Side sleepers:** you need a thicker pillow to sleep on. It keeps the head and neck in a neutral position. An older pillow won't support your head; it's too compressed from years of use.



**Back sleepers:** a thinner pillow under your head is okay for you—BUT you should still use a thicker pillow under your thighs. Lying in this position will take a lot of stress off your lower back. Make sure the pillow stays under your thighs, NOT your knees.



Side sleepers, you should use three pillows: a thick one under your head, a thick one for under your arm (think of it like you're giving the pillow a hug), and a thick one that goes between your knees. These extra pillows serve to take pressure off the shoulder joints and lower back.

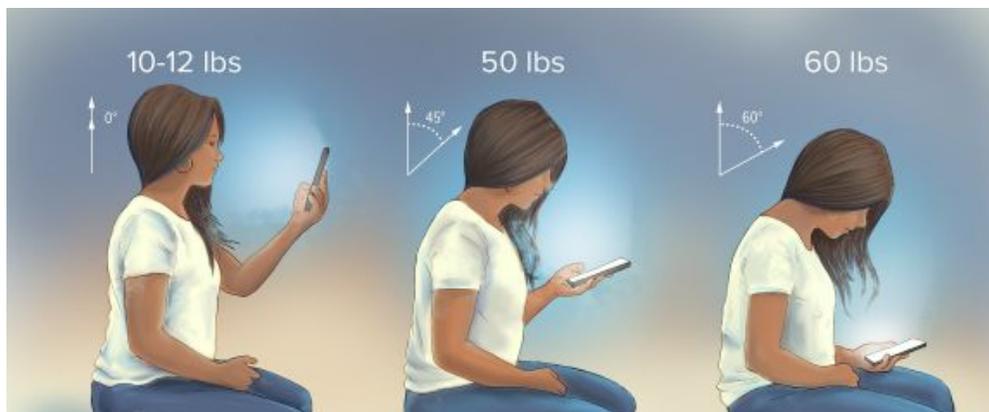
You don't need fancy pillows that are extra long or shaped differently. You just need something that isn't old and compressed!

### 3. POOR POSTURE

Poor posture is responsible for so many of the problems we see in the clinic, but none more than neck and shoulder pain!

Take a moment to find an empty wall. Stand with your back to it and try to touch as much of it as you can. Touch it with your heels, your butt (don't arch your back!), your back, your shoulders, your neck, and the back of your head. You should be able to do all of this at the same time. If you can't—or if you have a really hard time getting there—then your posture isn't living up to its potential!

If you tend to keep your head forward and your shoulders rounded (essentially, if you “slouch”), then you're putting a lot of stress on your neck and shoulders. Here's how much extra force you put on your neck when you slouch over:



**The solution to poor posture is to stand up straight!** Keep your shoulders low and pulled back—imagine that you're trying to put your right shoulder in your left back pocket, and vice versa! Don't arch your back, and keep your chin tucked in, almost like you're trying to create a “double chin.” Practice every day as often as you can, until you're finally able to stand flush against that wall.

## 4. TEXTING

If that last section rang true with you, then Text Neck will probably sound familiar, too! Text Neck is a form of poor posture—basically, it’s a popular new buzzword for an overuse syndrome that affects the necks of frequent phone users.



But it’s not just texting! Any activity that involves holding your neck in a down and forward position for an extended period of time can cause overuse syndrome...activities like:

- Reading a book or newspaper
- Playing cards
- Hunching over a computer
- Leaning over a desk to write or fill out paperwork
- Needlepoint
- Painting your nails
- Doing ANYTHING on a smartphone, including texting, checking emails, watching videos, and playing games

In order to do any of these things, most people let their heads “hang” and push their necks out so they can focus on our activities a little better. By doing this, they stop using muscles to hold up their necks—they let gravity pull the neck down, relying on passive structures (AKA ligaments!) to hold the head up.

**The solution?** Hold things up a little higher! Use your arms to bring your book, your cards, or your phone up to eye level, instead of craning your neck down to meet your hands.

## 5. SITTING TOO MUCH

Sitting is the new smoking! As a country, we now spend more money treating symptoms caused by sitting than symptoms caused by smoking. Let that sink in.

Unless you work in an extremely active environment, like at the gym or for a construction company, you probably spend more of your day sitting than you do standing—which contributes heavily to all those posture problems and Text Neck issues we talked about earlier!

**The solution? Stand up!** If you work a desk job, get up and walk around. Take breaks whenever you can to stand and stretch your legs. When you do have to sit, make sure you practice correct posture.

## 6. BREATHING WRONG

Lie on your back and breathe deeply with both hands resting on your lower stomach. Watch how your hands rise and fall with each breath—don't move any other part of your body, just your stomach!

This is called diaphragmatic breathing, or “belly” breathing. It lets your diaphragm do all the work, which is the way your body was designed to breathe. However, a lot of people have a bad habit of practicing “accessory muscle breathing.” Breathing with accessory muscles (like your scalenes, located on the sides of your neck) overworks muscles that weren't built for breathing! This is a very common cause of neck and shoulder pain.

**The solution? Breathe from the belly!** If you catch yourself moving your shoulders, rib cage, or chest when you breathe, adjust your technique to the diaphragmatic version. ONLY your stomach should be moving! Don't worry, it doesn't make you look fat.

## 7. STRESS

We saved the most common cause for last! Stress is an extremely common cause of neck and shoulder pain. When we become stressed, we tend to tense our muscles, and allow our shoulders to gravitate toward our ears. This causes a chain reaction: the raised shoulders engage the upper trap muscles, which pull on the back of the neck, which tips your head back, which extends the neck into one of those poor posture positions we keep discussing.

Any cervical spine extension causes pain—just like the stomach sleepers from all the way back at the beginning of this report, people who keep the neck in an extended position for a long period of time are bound to have neck and/or shoulder pain.



**The solution? Postural awareness!** Reducing stress will help this issue, of course, but so will keeping your shoulders pushed down. Practicing deep, diaphragmatic breathing will also help you relax while taking stress off your neck.

If any of these common causes of neck and shoulder pain resonated with you, you might benefit from physical therapy! Call (239) 676-0546 to schedule your free Full Body Diagnostic.

For more information about how your neck and shoulders work and how you can keep them healthy, call the authors of this free guide at (239) 676-0546 or email [hello@bridgingthegappt.com](mailto:hello@bridgingthegappt.com) and schedule a consultation.

## **ABOUT BRIDGING THE GAP PHYSICAL THERAPY**

Bridging The Gap opened its doors in January 2020. Our goal is to help active people stay fit, healthy, and mobile...without pain medications, injections, or surgery!

Our philosophy is based on completely natural solutions—we are firmly against painkillers and unnecessary surgeries. Our use of Manual Therapy techniques help the body return to efficiency through mobilization of joints, neurodynamics, fascia, and visceral (organ) mobilization. In other words, we get you better without surgery or drugs—and because you spend your entire session with one doctor, instead of seeing assistants or doing solo exercises, you're guaranteed to get better faster with us than you would with traditional physical therapy offices!

Call (239) 676-0546 for more information and we'll help you take the first steps toward the pain-free life you deserve.