Chronic Neck Pain Tip Sheet

Many Americans have resigned themselves to pain because they simply feel it’s a normal condition. According to a recent survey by the American Osteopathic Association (AOA), close to one in two Americans say pain is part of life, while another 41% believe pain is a standard part of the aging process.

The AOA survey also found:

**Pain does not discriminate.** Although many people think chronic pain is a normal part of aging, it can affect anyone – regardless of age. In fact, close to 65% of Americans ages 18 to 34 have experienced chronic pain or someone they care for has experienced chronic pain during the past year.

**Americans are keeping quiet.** Almost 60% of Americans confess they might not talk to a medical professional if they were suffering from chronic pain. And more than one-third of Americans would refuse to take doctor-recommended pain medications because they fear becoming addicted.

**Pain in the neck:** Neck pain is the number three cause of chronic pain; more than a quarter of Americans report being affected from pain in this area of their body.

Neck pain can be caused by a number of reasons – from something as simple as improper positioning while sleeping, or even sitting or standing with bad posture. It can also occur due to injuries, accidents, heavy lifting or other spinal issues.

Rob Danoff, DO, an AOA board-certified family physician and fellow of the American College of Osteopathic Family Physicians, explains common ways to treat chronic neck pain:

1) **Stretch.** Try stretching your neck out. Start by gently tilting your head from left to right, hold for 20 seconds on each side. Next, place your hand on top of your head and stretch your neck towards your shoulder on each side. Be sure to perform these stretches with slow, smooth movements. Make sure that you are doing it gradually as any quick stretch is more likely to tear a muscle or ligament. If you feel increased pain or numbness, stop that motion.

2) **Stand and sit up straight.** Your muscles try to keep your head in the right position at all times. But if you are not using good posture, it may cause the muscles to stretch, tighten, and trigger increased pain. Whether you are sitting or standing, make sure that your shoulders are in a straight line over your hips, and your ears are in a straight line over your shoulders.

3) **Apply heat or cold.** Another neck pain-relieving strategy involves warming or chilling the painful area of the neck. You can apply a heating pad at a comfortable setting or an ice pack or cool compress to relieve your neck pain for about 10 to 20 minutes at a time, four to six times per day. Be careful to use a towel or cloth between the heating pad or ice pack in order to avoid direct contact with the skin.

4) **Talk on speaker phone.** Talking on the phone with the phone receiver tucked between your neck and your shoulder can strain your neck. If you receive a phone call, make sure that you free up both hands to answer the call or invest in a hands-free device.

5) **Don’t give up on finding relief.** When home remedies aren’t helping, consider seeking medical advice from an experienced osteopathic physician (DO). DOs believe that looking at the whole body may help to find the true cause of your pain. Some DOs use osteopathic manipulative treatment (OMT) to help deal with chronic pain. With OMT, your DO will use his or her hands to move your muscles and joints through techniques that include stretching, gentle pressure and resistance. Sometimes a prescription pain medication may still be necessary along with other treatments. The important thing to remember is to consult your physician in order to come up with a treatment plan that is right for you.