

Postural Modifications to Improve Neck Comfort

If your neck or upper neck becomes sore when studying/working upright, try lying on your back (without a pillow or with a very small one) & hold your notes at eye level. If your study material is heavy, try lying on your side with your head on a pillow. **Lying down to study can make a huge difference on your pain because it unloads & rests your neck & upper back muscles & joints.** Change positions or get up and take a short walk when you start to feel sore or tired. If you need to sit to study or use a computer, do the following to improve your sitting posture:

- 1) Scoot your pelvis all the way to the back of the chair seat.
- 2) Place your feet flat on the floor with your knees bent at right angles. Use textbooks or boxes under your feet if necessary.
- 3) Place a rolled or bunched sweatshirt or jacket (or a lumbar cushion if you have one) between your lower back & the seat back. The goal is to replicate the same inward curvature that your low back assumes when you're standing. Your back should neither be flat nor curved excessively inward when you're sitting. If this is uncomfortable, try placing a folded sweatshirt beneath your "sitting bones" to tilt your pelvis forward (bottom left pic).
- 4) Lean backward into the chair backrest and let it support your upper body. When you do this correctly, your back muscles won't have to work as hard to hold your torso upright.
- 5) Lift the top of your head toward the ceiling as if it were being pulled upwards by a puppet string. Your head should be centered on your torso & NOT protruded/poked forward. When your head is protruded forward, your upper back & neck muscles have to work much harder to prevent your head from drooping forward. When the muscles work harder, they're more easily strained. If you've been shown the neck retraction maneuver, perform this (gently) 5 times every 15 minutes of sitting.
- 6) Use an elevated & inclined stand (e.g. music stand) to hold your reading or typing material. If necessary, place your textbook/typing material on top of several other books & lean them backwards against the wall.
- 7) If you use a laptop computer, place the laptop on a stack of books so the screen is at eye level when you look straight ahead (with good posture) and plug in an external keyboard & mouse instead of using the keyboard & mouse on the laptop. These are inexpensive and allow you to maintain good sitting posture and a comfortable position for your wrists & hands. Alternatively, use an external monitor.
- 8) Use arm rests to un-weight your arms. This reduces strain on muscles in your neck & upper back. Use folded towels or pillows to pad hard armrests. If you use gel or foam wrist rests/pads, do not to rest the full weight of your arms on the pads. This can concentrate pressure on the nerve at your wrist & cause carpal tunnel syndrome. Better to use arm rests & keep pressure completely off your wrists.
- 9) Take breaks from sitting every 15-30 minutes & lie down for 5-10 minutes if you're starting to get sore.
- 10) If you have a foam roller, lie on your back with the roller in your mid-back, perpendicular to your spine. Let your head rest backwards & roll up/down on the roller to massage sore muscles & help reduce the forward curvature of your upper back.

