

AVOID THE PAIN IN THE NECK

BY MELINDA TANGREDI, PT, DPT, OCS

There's a reason the phrase 'pain in the neck' is used to describe something that is bothersome and annoying. Anyone with literal neck pain knows they'd rather not deal with neck and shoulder discomfort. But for those with this actual pain while working, does it come with headaches or even some chest tightness? Perhaps with some tingling in one or both of the upper arms? We'll stick our necks out and say this is likely due to a condition known as Upper Crossed Syndrome or UCS.

DON'T MAKE ME CROSS

Upper Crossed Syndrome can oftentimes occur in jobs that require spending extended periods of time looking down, looking up, or staring at a screen. When we hold our muscles in these positions for prolonged periods of time, they can shift out of balance and alignment with each other.

UCS can develop when the front of neck muscles and the posterior shoulder muscles become long and weak. In turn, the opposing muscles of the anterior shoulder musculature and the posterior neck musculature become shortened and tight.



Upper Crossed Syndrome

Sometimes these muscle imbalances can cause postural disturbances, unnecessary discomfort, and even some muscle dysfunctions. We might not think it's a big deal in the present, but what might the pain look like in 15, 20 or 30 years? It's possible if these muscle imbalances are prolonged, it can even cause changes to the bones and joints in the long run. For the industrial athlete (and as you might suspect), those that lift heavy objects on a daily basis are **more prone** to musculoskeletal injuries when lifting with improper posture over those with proper posture.



We're sure you don't want to end up hardly able to stand up straight or unable to turn to check your blind spot on the freeway when changing lanes!

THE BEST POSITION IS...

So, you've achieved true *pain in the neck* status. What next? How do we avoid UCS when the job requires you to look up all day long?

Here's the secret and an old kinesiology saying - "**The best position is the next position.**" As often as you can, take a tiny microbreak to change your position. A microbreak doesn't mean take a 10-minute break and do a lap around your facility. Simply and periodically take 5 seconds to look the opposite direction of your work. Pay attention to any stress you are holding in your upper shoulders and tell those upper traps to let go!

Anytime you have a true break at work, allow your body 5 minutes of love. Try out these exercises or ask your Injury Prevention Specialist for a print out of [this handy UCS routine!](#)



Chin Tuck

Tuck your chin in towards your spine, elongating your spine and neck. Hold briefly.

Shoulder Blade Squeeze

Pinch the shoulder blades. Hold briefly.

Try a few simple chin tucks, a couple of shoulder blade

squeezes, and then find your favorite doorway at work or home and do a 30 second doorway stretch. A little truly can go a LONG way! You don't need to spend 1.5 hours in the gym to alleviate and prevent some of your discomfort. These stretches gently relax the tight muscles in the back of your neck. We also want to strengthen the long lazy muscles such as the back of the shoulder blade muscles and the deep neck flexors on the front of the neck.

Take back ownership over your body and protect your muscles and bones that work so hard for you.

Melinda Tangredi, PT, DPT, OCS || Melinda has been practicing physical therapy since 2013. After graduating with her doctorate she completed an orthopedic residency before working as an outpatient physical therapist. She has worked in the industrial setting since 2015. Melinda enjoys hiking, biking, swimming, camping and the general outdoors with her husband Jim, and her three children, Jameson, Gianna, and Leo.

Work Right NW is changing the way that companies view workplace hazards. Our focus is on educating the workforce to prevent injury. We provide access to Injury Prevention Specialists in the workplace to address the early signs of discomfort. We are changing the industry one company at a time by helping one person at a time.

