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Dr. Anshu
Professor, MD (HOM),
Department of Repertory,
Homoeopathic Medical College
and Hospital, Chandigarh,
India

Mohita Nangia
Intern, Homoeopathic Medical
College and Hospital,
Chandigarh, India

Text neck syndrome: The smartphone neck and it's homeopathic approach

Dr. Anshu and Mohita Nangia

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Abstract

The use of smartphones has been eminently increasing in recent years. This has led to health consequences one of which is Text Neck Syndrome caused by prolonged use of electronic devices with neck and back muscles in a hunched posture. It manifests as pain and stiffness in the upper back, neck and shoulders, accompanied by occipital headache, muscle fatigue and soreness. In the long term it can lead to complications such as cervical radiculopathy, cervical disc herniation and degeneration etc. This condition can be prevented by limiting use of cell phones and maintaining correct posture. It can be reversed by adequate exercise and physical therapy along with homeopathic remedies. The article also includes rubrics from Synthesis Repertory and Murphy Repertory that cover the above symptoms.

Keywords: text neck, homeopathic therapeutics

Introduction

Mobile phones have become an evident part of our lives today. An average individual spends 4 hours a day using cell phones, which makes it 1400 hours per year. And while we do so, we place our necks in an overstressed forward curve which results in a painful orthopedic condition called Text Neck or Tech Neck. Also known as Cervical Kyphosis, it presents as a common complaint of stiffness in upper back and shoulders or a sore neck that won't go away. The term Text Neck was coined by Dr. Dean Fishman, a U.S. chiropractor, and is defined as repetitive stress injury resulting in pain in the neck caused by excessive texting or watching on hand held electronic devices over a substantial period of time.

Prevalence and Incidence

There has been a significant rise in smartphone users in India from 748.32 million in the year 2020 to 844.84 million in the year 2021, amongst which the use is highest in the age group 16-24 years, followed by age group 24-35 years. The pandemic has led to adoption of online classes and work from home trends which has increased the use of smartphones and laptops and is a major contributory factor in the rising incidence of text or tech neck. A study reports 35% of smartphone users had text neck syndrome.

Prospective associations have been found between text messaging on mobile phones and musculoskeletal disorders. A study concluded that most people use smartphones in a non-ergonomic way. The results imply mostly short-term effects and to a lesser extent long term effects on musculoskeletal disorders in neck and upper extremity.

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Anshu
Professor, MD (HOM),
Department of Repertory,
Homoeopathic Medical College
and Hospital, Chandigarh,
India



In an upright posture, the head normally weighs about 10-12 pounds. When using phone, it is common to bend the head forward at a 45° or 60° angle, which adds about 50-60 pounds of extra weight on the neck. Since the centre of gravity moves forward, the neck muscles have to work harder to support the heavier head. Sustained or habitual bad posture results in stretching of soft tissues on one side and elongation or lengthening of the ones on the opposite side. This can cause irritation and strain on the ligaments, muscles or joints precipitating cervical pain.

Clinical features

The common manifestations of text neck include neck pain, stiffness and soreness. The main symptoms include:

Pain in the neck, upper back and shoulders: The pain could be either localized to a spot or diffused over an area or radiating. It is usually described as an intense, stabbing when localized and a dull, aching when generalized, such as extending from neck to shoulders.

Stiffness in neck: Inflammation and stress on soft tissues from continued bad posture causes them to stiffen or harden, resulting in reduced mobility of the neck. The patient experiences tightness, soreness and difficulty in moving the neck. It can vary in intensity from slight discomfort to extremely painful condition. This can affect the individual's activity levels.

Forward head posture and rounded shoulders: Forward head position causes dorsal neck muscles to over stretch and the ventral neck muscles to shorten excessively. This leads to distortion of normal cervical curvature. It has been commonly termed as iHunch or iPosture.

Muscle fatigue and weakness: Over straining in a particular position during smartphone use causes the muscles bellies to present with continuous fatigue. Shoulder muscles namely, trapezius, rhomboids and external rotators of shoulders weaken from overuse.

Shoulder pain: Since smartphones are small, individuals tend to hunch their shoulders to hold them. Incorrect postures while working on computers also causes one to hunch over their keyboards. This results in pain in the shoulders and also the arms.

Headaches: Sub occipital muscles could go into spasm and become painful, or pain could be referred from the neck up to the head. This results in tension type headaches.

Long term effects: These include

- Cervical disc herniation
- Flattening of thoracic kyphosis
- Spinal degeneration
- Disc compression
- Cervical radiculopathy

Prevention

In order to prevent text neck syndrome, one must follow certain measures

- Keep smartphones and other devices at eye level.
- Avoid hunching or bending.
- Take frequent breaks from smartphone use every 20-30

minutes, get up, move around and do a few stretches.

- Constant look-ups bring the neck back to its original neutral position.
- Sit with back and arms well supported if working on screen for a long time.
- Maintain a good posture by standing straight with chin tucked in and shoulders pulled back.
- Perform neck and upper back stretches periodically.
- Exercise regularly to make the neck and back strong and flexible in order to endure extra strain.
- Schedule or limit the use of mobile phones and other devices.

Management

- Physical agents
- Massage
- Exercises
- Cervical collar
- Postural and ergonomic advice

Physical agents: Various physical agents are commonly used to:

- Control inflammation
- Control pain and muscle spasm
- Control stiffness of soft tissues and joints
- Assist mobility

Superficial thermotherapy modalities like heat pads

Pain reducing procedures of cryotherapy in the form of ice massage and ice packs.

Massage: Massage manipulations like circular kneading and frictions to the localized areas effectively reduce the spasm and pain, thereby induce relaxation.

Exercises: Exercises aimed at strengthening the extensors of the neck help in decreasing the angle of kyphosis. Stretching helps in restoring flexibility and improving movement- thus helps in relieving the pain.

- Neck side bends and rotations in clockwise and anticlockwise directions.
- Shoulder rotations forward and backwards in sets of 5 rotations.
- Overhead arm reaches with each arm in sets of 5.

Muscle strengthening exercises such as scapular squeeze, superman raises, wall angles etc. are helpful. These exercises can be combined with resistance bands and dumbbells.

Daily stretching and regular strengthening exercises will help relieve the pain and improve mobility.

Yoga exercises help in correcting posture, improving balance and strengthening muscles. e.g., dhanurasana, chakravakasana, vasisthasana, etc.

Cervical collar: The use of cervical collar is indicated when temporary rest is needed e.g., during strenuous forward bending postures at work

Postural and ergonomic advice: Posture is the commonest factor contributing in kyphosis. Advice on the maintenance of posture of the neck in relation to various body positions and ergonomics play a predominant role in the majority of patients. The correct posture of the neck during work and

rest should be encouraged. Ergonomic advice is the single most important approach which can prevent recurrence.

Homoeopathic therapeutics

- **Strychniumpurum:** Soreness and tenderness of muscles. Rigidity of cervical muscles of back, stiffness, icy sensation down the spine; stitching shooting pain in the cervical region in afternoon; violent jerking, twitching and trembling cramp like pains.
- **Niccolum met:** Cracking in cervical vertebrae when moving the head; pain on top as from nail; worse rising from stooping; pain as if sprained in cervical region; suited to debilitated, nervous, literary persons.
- **Phosphoric acid:** Especially for young persons who have grown rapidly; formication in the back, violent pain on rising, after stooping; burning pain in one spot about small of back; limbs feel weak and are cold to touch, amelioration from heat and wrapping up; weakness of body and apathy of mind.
- **Cimicifuga:** Upper and lower cervical vertebrae sore to touch, when bending head forward, feeling as if spinal cord would be drawn out; nausea and retching on pressure upon the spine between the fourth and fifth vertebrae, with fainting. Stiff neck, pain aggravated by moving the hands.
- **Causticum:** Feeling as if cold wind blowing between the shoulders; aching at inner margin of right scapula on moving arm or turning head to that side; pain better after rising; lameness in small of back; weakness and trembling of limbs. Causticum is a curative remedy in this shortening of the tendons and muscles.
- **Paris quadrifolia:** Dull pain in nape of neck, increasing at times in acuteness with numbness, heat and weight; ameliorated by rest, open air, exertion. Tearing, drawing from shoulders to fingers. Violent pains in both sides of neck extending down to fingers especially left side aggravated mental exertion. Affections of head, spine and eyes with heaviness and numbness.
- **Rhustox:** Pain and stiffness in the small of back; aggravation by sitting or lying; amelioration by motion or lying on something hard; cervical stiffness causing patient to stretch and move about; pain in inner upper left scapula; ailments from over-exertion, overstraining, spraining. Tension as if shortening of muscle. The above complaints are associated with restlessness, anxiety and apprehension.

Rubrics covered for neck pain in Synthesis Repertory

Neck, pain

Grade I: Lach

Grade II: Arn, asaf, asar, bell, carb-v, merc, rhod,

Grade III: Abrot, acon, aesc, agar, agnus, alum, am-c, am-m, ambr, anac, ang, ant-c, ant-t, apis, arg-met, arg-n, ars, aur, bar-c, bism, bov, bry, calc, calc-p, camph, cann-s, canth, caps, carb-an, caust, cham, chin, cic, cina, cocc, cocc, colch, coloc, croc, cupr, cycl, dig, dulc, ferr, fl-ac, graph, grat, guaj, hell, hep, ign, iod, kali-bi, kali-c, kali-n, kalm, led, lyc, m-ambo, m-arct, mag-c, mag-m, mang, meny, meph, merc-c, mez, mosch, naja, nat-c, nat-m, nat-s, nit-ac, nux-v, olnd, par, ph-ac, phos, plat, plb, podo, psor, puls, ran-s, rhus-t, ruta, sabad, sabin, samb, sars, sel, sep, sil, spig, spong, squil, staph, stront-c, sul-ac, sulph, tarax, ter, teucr, thuj, verat, verat-v, viol-o, zinc

Neck, stiffness

Grade I: Bell, bry

Grade II: Am-m, brom, canth, chin, ign, m-ambo, phos, phyt

Grade III: Alum, am-c, ang, arg-met, ars, calc, calc-p, camph, carb-ancaust, cham, chel, cic, cocc, coloc, croc, cupr, cycl, dig, ferr, gels, glon, graph, hell, kali-bi, kreos, laur, lyc, lycps-v, par, petr, ph-ac, plb, rhod, rhus-t, sel, sep, sil, spong, squil, staph, sulph, thuj, verat, zinc

Back, pain, cervical region, bending head, agg

Grade III: Camph, cemic, dulc, graph, kali-p, olib-sac, rad-br, rhus-t, stann, tritc-vg, vanil

Back, pain, cervical region, nape of neck

Grade I: Carb-v, phyt, sulph

Grade II: Acon, am-c, am-m, ant-c, bar-c, berb, calc, caust, cic, cemic, con, gels, graph, kali-n, lachn, mag-p, mosch, nux-m, plat, puls, sabin, stry

Grade III: Adon, aesc, agar, agn, alum, ambr, aml-ns, amp, anac, ang, ant-t, apis, arn, ars, asaf, bad, bapt, bell, borx, bov, bry, bufo, calc-p, camph, cann-s, cann-xyz, canth, caps, chel, chin, chinin-ars, cina, cinnb, coca, cocc, colch, coloc, crot-t, cupr, cycl, dig, dios, dulc, euph, fago, fel, ferr, ferr-pic, fl-ac, form, gard-j, glon, guaj, ham, hep, hydr-ac, hyos, hyper, ign, iod, ip, jug-c, kali-bi, kali-c, kali-p, kali-perm, lach, laur, led, lyc, m-ambo, mag-c, mag-m, mang, meny, meph, merc, merc-i-r, mez, musca-d, myric, nat-c, nat-ch, nat-m, nat-s, nept-m, nicc, nux-v, olnd, par, petr, ph-ac, phos, phys, pic-ac, plb, pneu, prun, psor, rad-br, ran-b, rheum, rhod, rhus-t, ruta, sabad, sal-fr, samb, sang, sars, sep, sil, spig, spong, stann, staph, stram, stront-c, sul-ac, symph, tab, tarax, thuj, tritc-vg, vanil, verat, verat-v, vib-od, viol-t, x-ray, xan, zinc, zinc-val

Back, stiffness, cervical region, nape of neck

Grade I: Bar-c, bell, calc, carb-v, caust, kali-c, lach, lyc, mag-c, nat-c, phos, sep, sil, stict

Grade II: Acon, aur, cemic, con, lachn, nat-m, plat, rhus-t, sel

Grade III: agar, alum, am-m, anac, ang, ant-t, apis, arg-met, arg-n, ars, bov, brass-n-o, bry, bufo, calc-caust, calc-p, camph, cann-xyz, canth, caps, carb-an, cham, chel, chin, cocc, colch, coloc, dig, dros, dulc, ferr-p, fl-ac, form, gels, glon, graph, guaj, hell, hyos, hyper, ign, jug-c, kali-bi, kali-n, lac-c, lat-m, laur, mang, med, mentho, meny, merc, merc-i-r, mez, nicot, nux-v, petr, ph-ac, phyt, pimp, podo, psor, puls, rad-br, rhod, rhodi, rhus-v, ruta, sars, sec, spig, spong, squil, stann, staph, stel, sulph, tab, thuj, trif-p, verat, vinc, x-ray, zinc

Back, pain, cervical region, extending to, head

Grade I: sil

Grade II: Carb-v, cemic, ferr, par, puls

Grade III: Ambr, apis, bamb-a, bung-fac, calc, calc-p, fic-m, gels, grat, kalm, kola, lap-la, meny, nat-sil, ozone, sang, stront-c, tritc-vg, vanil

Back, pain, cervical region, extending to, occiput

Grade I: Gels, sil

Grade II: Calc, cinnb, ferr, nat-s, petr, phyt

Grade III: Bung-fa, cal-p, caust, chel, crat, cyt-l, dulc, eup-per, fic-m, gink-b, glon, guaj, hell, kali-c, kali-p, kalm, kola, lat-m, lyc, nat-c, nat-m, olib-sac, ozone, ph-ac, pin-s, spig, symph,

valer, vanil, verat

Back, pain, cervical region, extending to, shoulder

Grade III: Alum, am-m, laur, positr, stry, thuj, til

Head, pain, accompanied by, neck, pain in

Grade I: gels

Grade II: Alum, bamb-a, bell, calc-p, carb-v, carbn-s, glon, hell, kalm, nat-m, pic-ac

Murphy Repertory

Neck, pain

Grade II: Ars, bell, caust, cic, gels, graph, lac-c, par, ph-ac, rhod

Grade III: Acon, aesc, aeth, agar, alum, am-c, anac, apis, ars-i, asar, atro, bry, calc, calc-p, camph, carb-v, chel, chin, chin-s, cinnb, coloc, con, daph, dros, dulc, ferr-p, fl-ac, form, glon, guai, hell, hep, ign, ip, kali-ar, kali-bi, kali-p, kalm, lach, lyc, lyss, mag-p, med, merc, mez, nat-s, nux-m, phos, phyt, puls, ran-b, sang, sil, tab, zinc

Grade IV: Abrot, ail, all-c, all-s, alumn, ambr, ang, ant-c, arg, arn, arum-t, aur-m-n, bar-c, berb, bor, cact, calc-s, cann-i, cann-s, canth, carb-ac, carb-an, carbn-s, card-m, chin-ar, cimic, clem, coc-c, cod, colch, crot-c, crot-h, cund, cupr, cupr-ar, cur, cycl, dig, dios, dol, echi, eup-per, ferr, ferr-ar, gamb, grat, jac-c, kali-c, kali-cy, kali-n, kali-s, lachn, lact, laur, led, lil-t, mag-c, meph, mosch, myric, naja, nat-m, nit-ac, nux-v, olnd, ol-an, onos, ox-ac, pall, petr, phys, pic-ac, pip-m, plb, podo, psor, raph, rat, rhus-t, rumx, ruta, sabin, samb, sarr, sars, sel, sep, spig, stann, stram, stap, h, stry, sulph, tarax, tarent, ter, thuj, vario, verat, vesp

Neck, stiffness

Grade I: caust, rhus-t

Grade II: Agar, anac, arg, bar-c, bell, calc, chel, cimic, cic, euph, hell, ign, ind, kali-c, lach, lachn, lyc, mag-c, nit-ac, nux-v, sil

Grade III: Aesc, alum, am-m, ang, ant-t, apis, ars, bap, brom, bry, calc-p, canth, carb-v, cedr, chin, cocc, coloc, dig, dros, dulc, fl-ac, gels, glon, graph, guai, hep, kali-bi, kali-chl, kali-i, kali-n, kali-s, lac-c, led, lyss, manc, mang, merc, mez, nat-c, nat-m, nat-s, par, petr, phos, phyt, phys, plat, podo, psor, puls, rat, rhod, rhus-v, sang, sep, spig, spong, staph, stry, sulph, syph, tab, tarent, thuj, zinc

Grade IV: Acon, am-c, anan, arum-t, asar, aur, bad, berb, brach, calad, calc-s, camph, cann-i, caps, carb-ac, carb-an, carbn-s, caul, chin-ar, colch, com, cor-r, cupr-ac, cycl, elaps, eup-per, fago, ferr-ar, ferr-i, ferr-p, form, get, hura, hyos, kalm, kali-p, laur, meny, merc-i-f, merc-i-r, morph, mur-ac, myric, nat-ar, mat-p, ol-an, pall, ph-ac, plb, sec, sel, squil, stann, stict, stram, tep, tub, vario, verat, vib, x-ray, zing

Neck, pain, extending to occiput

Grade II: gels, sil

Grade III: Cinnb, ferr, nat-s, phyt

Grade IV: Bell, bry, calc-p, chel, chin, chin-s, dulc, eup-per, glon, hell, kali-c, kalm, lat-m, nat-c, nat-m, nux-v, puls, spig, tub, valer, verat, zinc-p

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