

In today's technology-thirsty society, it's rare to not see someone with their head down texting on their cell phone or reading the latest status updates on Facebook.

However, too much texting and tilting your head down can become a pain in the neck for some people. An excessive amount of leaning your head forward and down, while looking at a phone or other mobile device could result in what some people call "text neck."

"People get so focused on these devices that they end up holding their neck and upper back in abnormal positions for a long period of time; enough that other people coined the phrase 'text neck,' which is essentially referring to postural pain," said Chris Cornett, M.D., orthopaedic surgeon and spine specialist at UNMC's Department of Orthopaedic Surgery and Rehabilitation.

The term was first coined by a chiropractor in Florida. It's defined as overuse syndrome involving the head, neck and shoulders, usually resulting from excessive strain on the spine from looking down at hand held devices.

"When you hold your body in an abnormal position, it can increase stress on the muscles, cause fatigue, muscle spasms and even stress headaches," Dr. Cornett said. "With every degree of motion to the front or side that you move your head, the stress on your neck is magnified beyond just the weight of the head."

He added that what we assume, but do not necessarily know, is whether or not this is causing long term increased stress on the other structures in your neck, such as the discs and joints.

Dr. Cornett has seen patients who have complained about this sort of discomfort and has even experienced it himself.

However, Dr. Cornett suggested a few ways to help alleviate or avoid text neck.

- Modify the position of the device—Instead of having the device in your lap or causing you to lean your head down, find a way to hold the device at a neutral, eye level.
- Take breaks— Be aware that you're using these technology devices throughout the day and force yourself to take a break and to change or alter your position.
- Physical fitness—Having a strong, flexible back and neck will help you deal with abnormal stresses and reduce musculoskeletal issues.