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INSIDE: A NEW CHAPTER

# Say no to neck pain

From sleep trouble to a host of daytime problems, an estimated 70% of people experience neck issues at some point in their life. Some basic remedies can make a big difference.

BY DRS. MARCO AND PAOLO DE CIANTIS

**Y**ou spend a third of your life sleeping—26 years, on average. While it's arguably the easiest activity you can do, there is a right way and a wrong way to do it. Time and again, it's been shown in theory and practice that investing in the proper sleep accessories—and learning proper posture—will result in good mornings.

With the average head weighing between 10 and 11lbs, resting it in an awkward position can irritate neck joints and lead to an inflammatory response. So the best thing you can do for yourself is keep your neck in the most neutral position possible.

## PILLOW TALK

Contrary to what you'll find on most beds across North America, we recommend eschewing the traditional down-filled pillow in favour of one that will conform and adapt to your body shape. Memory foam or water-based pillows provide continuous cervical support while you sleep.

If you are a fan of down-filled pillows and there's no converting you, sleep on only one or an *absolute maximum* of two pillows. Be sure to replace them every six months. This is good practice for keeping a neutral neck position and avoiding a dust mite infestation.

## WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE POSITION?

Not *that* kind of position—sleeping position. Some are better than others. Falling asleep on your back in a supine position is your best bet; sleeping on your side comes in second place for neck support. Bad news for those who like to sleep on their stomachs: This is the worst position you can sleep in, creating a lot of strain and discomfort. Start training yourself to sleep any other way!

## ROLL AROUND

Remember that exercise from the 1980s where you roll your neck in one direction and switch to the opposite? It's still a good move (see pg. 55). Move and manipulate the musculature in your neck throughout the day to keep it limber.

Every hour, drop your chin to your chest and hold for a few seconds. Then, roll your neck to the left, back, to the right, and down again in a circular motion. Repeat this movement

pattern five times, then switch direction, this time initiating the action by rolling to the right.

## GRAB A BALL

The most useful tools can be found in the most unexpected places. Dust off your tennis bag and grab a tennis ball. With your back against a wall, place the ball just below shoulder height, wedged between yourself and the wall. With bent knees, move your body up and down using the ball as a massage tool to release knots and ease sore spots. Be sure to do this gently. Roll slowly and surely rather than aggressively to avoid causing further injury. When you hit a particularly sore spot, focus on continuous and repetitive *gentle* movements on the area to gradually loosen up the muscles.

## HOT AND COLD THERAPY

We're big proponents of ice and heat therapy—it's easy to do at home. Applying warm (not burning) heat to sore spots will help tight muscles to relax. If you don't have a heat pack available, substitutes include a warm towel or hot water bottle. Apply heat directly to pain points for as long as 20 minutes at a time before taking a break.

Alternate heat with cold therapy. A cold compress will dull pain and limit the buildup of lactic acid, a contributor to sore muscles and DOMS (delayed onset of muscle soreness). Limit yourself to 10 minutes at a time.

## CHECK IN WITH A PRO

When all else fails, check in with a professional. Chiropractors, acupuncturists and registered massage therapists are all well trained in releasing tight neck muscles. A certified chiropractic practitioner can address the neck with soft tissue therapy and gentle mobilizations to mitigate aching joints and tight neck muscles. A combination of chiropractic treatment with exercise movements is proven to be more effective than treating this area with over-the-counter pain relievers. Other treatments may include low-level laser therapy and Interferential current (IFC).

An acupuncturist uses small needles to release muscle tension with direct stimulation. Acupuncture can be an effective



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treatment for conditions such as migraines, osteoarthritis, and back, shoulder and neck pain.

A registered massage therapist can perform myofascial release to immediately relieve neck pain by gently massaging the affected tissue. They can also work through the entire spinal system to restore it to health.

The best practice is always to take preventative actions, rather than waiting until the pain becomes a problem. Start

incorporating some or all of these practices into your day to keep neck pain at bay. **2**

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*Drs. Marco and Paolo De Ciantis are Toronto-based chiropractic doctors and co-owners of Sports Specialist Rehab Centre. The identical twins specialize in pain and injury prevention, working with patients from athletes looking to improve their performance to individuals who want day-to-day tasks to be easier, in an effort to restore optimal well-being.*