

This patient page is excerpted from a podcast by Ram Haddas, PhD. Find it at [spine.org/podcasts](http://spine.org/podcasts) to learn more about the mechanics, symptoms and treatments of text neck.

### What is text neck?

Text neck is an epidemic or, at least, it's very common. Just look around you, everyone has their heads down. Text neck is described as a repetitive stress injury, or overuse syndrome in the neck. It is caused by prolonged use of mobile devices with the head bent down and not moving.

### Who does text neck affect?

Text neck can affect anyone. Recently, spine providers have noticed an increase in patients with neck and upper back pain, likely related to poor posture during prolonged smartphone use. A scientific paper from *The Spine Journal* reported that young patients who shouldn't yet have back and neck issues are reporting disc hernias and alignment problems. Children and adolescents may be at a higher risk and experience shoulder and arm pain, eye strain, stress, anxiety, depression and decreased school performance.

### What are the symptoms of text neck?

- Pain in the neck, upper back, and/or shoulder
- Forward head posture and rounded shoulders
- Reduced mobility
- Headache
- Increased pain when neck flexed forward

### How can I prevent text neck?

While it is nearly impossible to avoid the technologies that cause these issues, individuals should make an effort to look at their phones with a neutral spine and to avoid spending hours each day hunched over.

Here are a few recommendations for preventing neck pain while using smartphones, tablets, kindles, and other handheld devices:

- Raise the phone up closer to eye level so the head does not have to be tilted forward.
- Avoid prolonged static postures.
- Stand up straight. Good posture, with the chin tucked in and shoulders pulled back, keeps the body aligned in a neutral position.
- Avoid excessive usage and take frequent breaks.
- Arch the neck and upper back backward periodically to ease muscle pain.
- Exercise regularly. A strong, flexible back and neck are more able to handle the extra stress.
- Avoid high repetitions of movements such as prolonged typing or swiping.
- Avoid holding large or heavy devices in one hand for a long duration.
- **Turn technology in your favor!** Phone apps are available that can detect when your phone is being held at a bad angle for your neck. When the app senses a bad angle, it alerts you to hold the phone up higher.

The more you tilt your head forward, the greater the force on your neck.



0°	15°	30°	45°	60°
10-12 lbs (5 kg)	27 lbs (12 kg)	40 lbs (18 kg)	49 lbs (22 kg)	60 lbs (27 kg)

Please visit [knowyourback.org](http://knowyourback.org) for more information on an array of spine health topics or find a NASS provider.

### Should I see a doctor?

If neck pain keeps returning or is accompanied by a severe headache, fever, nausea, unintended weight loss, dizziness, pain or tingling that radiates down into the arm or hand, or other troubling symptoms, seek medical attention.

If you have arm pain, tingling, or weakness in addition to neck pain, that could be a sign of a pinched nerve and should be checked by a doctor. Any of these symptoms with neck pain could indicate a serious underlying medical condition that needs to be accurately diagnosed by a doctor to get the correct treatment.

### What are the treatments for text neck?

Rehabilitation is found to be very effective in treating text neck.

In acute cases, pain relief is the main goal and it can be achieved by:

- Regular neck movements: rotations and side bending
- Restoring function to upper trapezius and serratus
- Chin tuck exercises
- Ice/heat packs
- Massage

In chronic cases, your doctor may recommend pain medication, facet joint or trigger point injections, or acupuncture.

**Tear this page out and use it as a resource to educate your patients about text neck. Use [KnowYourBack.org](http://KnowYourBack.org) for more patient information.**