

HEADS UP ON TECH NECK



ACA SPINAL HEALTH WEEK
26 MAY - 1 JUNE 2025

Adjust Your Thinking.

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ACA urges Aussies to join the movement and #AdjustYourThinking to prevent tech neck! “Get the heads up on tech neck!” – National Spinal Health Week is 26 May to 1 June 2025

With over 34 million mobile phone connections and 95% of Australians accessing the internet via a smartphone, the focus of the Australian Chiropractors Association’s (ACA) annual national *Spinal Health Week* (26 May to 1 June 2025) is preventing *Tension Neck Syndrome* (TNS) known as “tech neck”.

Also referred to as ‘*text neck*’, tech neck is a neck-related musculoskeletal disorder (MSD) resulting from incorrect or overuse of smartphones, tablets, computers and other electronic devices, with MSDs (including tech neck) costing the Australian economy over \$55 billion annually.

MSDs affect the joints, bones, muscles and multiple body areas (including the neck) of people of all ages.

If unresolved, the health implications of tech neck can be debilitating causing headaches, neck, shoulder and upper back pain, with the severity of symptoms often equating to the frequency and duration of smartphone, tablet or computer use which, over time, can cause changes to the natural curve of the cervical spine.

Incorrect, non-ergonomic posture habits when using mobile devices and poorly setup computers (including laptops) at home, school, university or in the workplace can lead to developing tech neck.

Toby said, “With tech neck emerging as a major global public health concern as smartphone, tablet and computer use increases; being vigilant in how we use our devices is key to maintaining a healthy spine and avoiding MSDs including tech neck.

“Studies have shown smartphone and computer use can have a significant impact on pain severity among tech neck sufferers with the most prevalent symptoms of neck and back pain linked to the length of time spent using a device and the degree of discomfort experienced,” said Toby.

“Although more studies are needed to better understand the implications of incorrect and overuse of technology on spinal health; to help prevent tech neck, we need to adjust our thinking on how we use devices particularly young people who spend prolonged periods with their head bent forward viewing a smartphone,

With over 5.3 million Australians suffering tech neck; regular movement, stretching, changing posture and the way we use our devices can help prevent tech neck and maximise spinal health.

“To help prevent tech neck, the ACA recommends limiting recreational screentime to two hours per day, holding devices at eye level to prevent bending the neck forward, and taking regular breaks every ten minutes to look away from the device and move the neck from side-to-side,” he said.

“Computer use is also a primary cause of tech neck. Although most common among office workers, with 75.5% of Australians aged 16 to 64 using computers daily, incorrect use and computer set up can lead to a range of MSDs.

“Whether using a laptop or a desktop at home, school, university or at work, it’s essential for workstations to be set up to be ergonomically correct to help prevent tech neck, increase productivity and maintain overall spinal health and wellbeing,”

“ACA recommends using computers at a desk with the monitor or laptop screen adjusted to eye level height. It’s also important to use an adjustable ergonomic office chair to allow the knees to be slightly lower than the hips and where possible, users should consider a sit-stand desk to help reduce spinal strain,” he said.

“Importantly, ensure posture is upright with shoulders relaxed and feet flat on the floor and take regular postural breaks every 30 minutes for movement and stretching - not only is this good for the spine it’s also refreshes the mind,” said Toby.

ACA President Dr Billy Chow said, “Once primarily experienced by seniors, with the advent of smart devices and wide-spread use of tablets and computers, we’re seeing a growing number of younger patients in their 30s and 40s suffering from cervical spine disorders because of incorrect use of technology devices.

A recent study ‘*The Association Between Mobile Phone Usage Duration, Neck Muscle Endurance, and Neck Pain Among University Students*’ published in *Nature* (29.8.2024), examined the correlation between phone use, duration, addiction, neck muscle endurance, and neck pain in university students.

“Although the study focused on mobile phone use by university students, with almost 87% of Australians now regular smartphone users and 75.5% being computer users, it’s fair to consider the findings may be broadly applied to the population generally, particularly young people who’ve grown up using smartphones and tablets,” said Dr Chow.

“During national *Spinal Health Week*, we’re encouraging all Australians to adjust their thinking on how they use smartphones, tablets and computers by joining the movement to help prevent persistent, aggravated head, neck and upper back injuries which impact productivity at home, school and at work,” he said.

“To better manage spinal health, we must ensure we always maintain good posture starting with the correct sitting position, taking regular breaks from technology to move and stretch.

“When it comes to smartphones, not only must we monitor the length of time we use our devices, but we must be cognisant that overuse and the way we use them can negatively impact our spinal health,” Dr Chow said.

For sufferers of tech neck, while medications may offer temporary relief from neck and back pain, academic studies (including a Sydney University study) show opioids do not benefit people with acute neck or back pain (lasting up to 12 weeks) and have no positive role in treatment.

“Studies show commencing treatment promptly is crucial to prevent further functional decline and progression to a chronic condition. For effective treatment outcomes achieved through a combination of strengthening and stretching exercises, manual therapy and postural correction, consult an ACA chiro,” he said.

“Every week over 400,000 chiropractic healthcare consultations help create well-adjusted Australians as ACA chiropractors play an important role in improving the spinal health of everyday Australians,” said Dr Chow.

With prevention the best protection, get the heads up on tech neck and download ACA’s *FREE Avoiding Tech Neck Factsheets* and *Electronic Device Checklists for Adults, Parents and Students, the Ergonomic Checklist*, and the *Stand Corrected Stretching Poster* available to download from www.spinalhealthweek.org.au.

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