



## Ergonomics Advisor

### The Hazards of Forward Head Posture

People who sit in front of the computer all day or who lead sedentary lives are at increased risk of developing **forward head posture (FHP)**, one of today's greatest postural concerns. (Referenced in numerous articles.)



*Many employees assume a forward head posture position when at the computer. \**

*\* Image provided courtesy of Remedy Interactive, USA.*

#### What is FHP?

As the name suggests, in FHP the head juts out in front of the shoulders, rather than sitting directly above the shoulders and spinal column. In

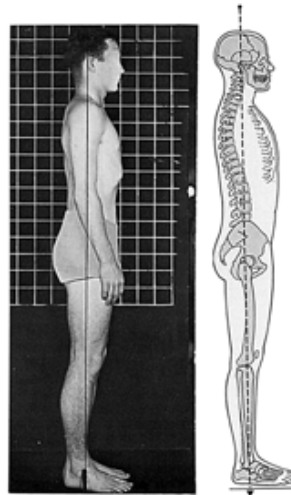
FHP, the centre of gravity of the head shifts from resting over the vertebrae to being over the facet joints and contributes to upper back and neck muscle tightness. The head shift causes a narrowing of the foramen (hole) where the nerves feed off the spinal cord and can contribute to compression of the nerves running down the arm, resulting in numbness and tingling in the arm. There are varying degrees of FHP.

**Anderson Ergonomics Consulting** understands the importance of good posture and comfort for the health, happiness and productivity of all employees.

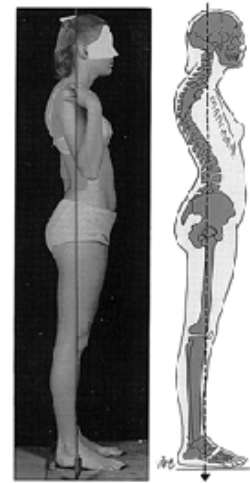
#### Why does FHP happen?

The following are some of the factors that medical experts believe cause or contribute to FHP:

- Straining to see the computer screen



Normal posture



Poor posture

- Bending forward to read documents flat on the desk or to view the monitor
- Tight chest muscles that pull the head forward
- Perching on the chair
- Poor postural habits
- Driving with the head forward and unsupported
- Degenerative diseases such as osteoarthritis
- Trauma to the neck or spinal column
- Sleeping with a large pillow
- Airway breathing problems
- Hyperpronation of the foot

#### A self-test for FHP

1. Position your heels a maximum of 6 inches from an unobstructed wall.
2. Stand so your buttocks, back and head touch the wall.



Use this exercise to help stretch tight chest (pectoral) muscles. These tight, shortened muscles are present in people with FHP and pull the head and shoulders forward.

**A regimen to reduce FHP should always include exercises to strengthen the weakened, stretched muscles of the neck and upper back, which are responsible for pulling the head backward.**

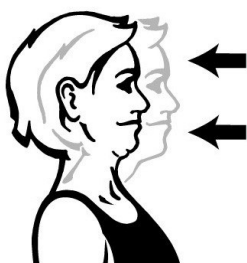
Is it difficult for you to stand like this? Are you more comfortable if you let your head fall forward?

If you answered **YES**, you may have FHP.

### Health-related problems

With FHP, the accumulated strain on the cervical spine, the upper back and neck muscles and the rest of the body can cause the following problems over time:

- Neck and upper back pain
- Pain or numbness down arm
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Decreased lung capacity
- Decreased range of motion
- Altered balance and mobility



Make a conscious effort to bring your head back and over your shoulders throughout the day.

### What can be done about FHP?

1. Arrange for an ergonomic assessment by a Certified Professional Ergonomist. Little things like adjusting your chair to support your back properly and bringing your monitor closer to you can improve your posture immediately.

2. Relearn sitting, standing and sleeping postural habits. Try to keep your head, neck and spine in normal alignment as much as possible. You'll need to keep reminding yourself until good posture becomes a habit.

3. Take breaks throughout the day, alternating between sitting and standing, and

**S - T - R - E - T - C - H .**  
Try the Stretches on this page.

4. Establish a regular exercise program that includes exercises to strengthen the weakened, stretched muscles of the neck and upper back that are responsible for pulling the head backward. Perform stretches to relax the tight, shortened chest (pectoral) muscles which, when tight, pull the head forward.

5. If concerned, ask

### Tips for Combating FHP

1. Book ergonomic assessment
2. Ensure proper workstation set-up
3. Practice good neutral posture
4. Correct your head position often
5. Take regular breaks
6. Exercise regularly
7. Stretch tight chest muscles
8. Strengthen upper back and neck
9. Sleep with correct pillow
10. Wear proper shoes
11. Consult physician if concerned

your doctor to refer you for a complete postural examination.

**Anderson Ergonomics Consulting** offers assessments where a Certified Professional Ergonomist will work with you to assess your workstation and your posture, and then make suggestions for improvements. AEC also offers a Stretching Guide for Office and Industrial Workers.

Contact us at  
(403) 241-7887  
or email

[shona@anderson-ergo.ca](mailto:shona@anderson-ergo.ca)

Please visit our website  
[www.anderson-ergo.ca](http://www.anderson-ergo.ca)