

Healthy Living

Patient Information from the American Chiropractic Association

Posture Pitfalls of a Working Mom

Sandy Smith woke up to the annoying and familiar sound of the alarm clock. It was another day and the beginning of another hectic week. She rolled from her stomach onto her back and unburied herself from beneath the old, down-filled pillows. Sandy reached over and pressed the snooze button in an attempt to steal five more minutes of peace. As Sandy stretched, she felt the pain -- a stiff ache that had unfortunately loomed over her body every morning for quite some time.

Once out of bed, Sandy leaned over and tried to concentrate on making the perfect hospital corners. She slightly lifted the large, squishy mattress, and tucked the corners just right, trying to ignore her stiff muscles and joints. She shuffled into the bathroom and brought her toothbrush to her mouth. Hunched over the sink, trying to avoid the tired reflection staring back at her, Sandy brushed her teeth. Her motions were slow this morning, but she had no time to concern herself with a little pain.

"Here they come," Sandy thought to herself as she heard the pitter-patter of four little feet running down the hallway. The kids were awake, eager to begin the day. Sandy threw on a skirt and sweater, pulling her brown high heels out from the back of the closet.

"Ow," Sandy exclaimed. The pain in her back sent a sharp signal to her brain that the day was not going to run smoothly. She clomped down the hall to retrieve the hairbrush stuck in her daughter's long hair, and her feet found Barbie. Her heels had little traction and she grabbed the banister for support.

Realizing she was late, Sandy bent over to scoop up her 2-year-old. Her back seemed to yell at her, and she suddenly realized her toddler was becoming heavier every day. Sandy felt the beginning of a headache.



"I love Mondays," Sandy said to herself as she sat in traffic. She reached for her cell phone, cradling it between her neck and head. Her conference call would need to be conducted in the car, and her headache only worsened.

Thirty minutes later, Sandy pulled into her parking place. She sprang from her car, heaved her over-stuffed leather bag over her shoulder, and scurried through the office doors.

Monday Madness

Sandy's Monday morning was filled with telephone calls and last minute deadlines. She tried to type and talk at the same time, constantly crossing and re-crossing the left leg over the right. She began breathing erratically when she realized her deadline would not be met. The lunch hour was approaching, and it suddenly occurred to Sandy that she had not taken a break all morning. Her computer screen appeared blurry and her wrists were stiff.

The remainder of Sandy's day was much of the same, and she could not wait to take off her shoes. After skip-

ping lunch and sitting through meetings, Sandy drug herself to her car, threw her bag in the back seat and started the stressful trek home.

That night, after the kids devoured dinner, Sandy longed for a long hot shower. The girls were in the bathtub, and she winced as she reached over to carefully lift her toddler onto the floor. By this time, her neck and joints screamed in pain and Sandy wanted nothing more than to climb into bed.

It was 11 p.m. and Sandy was finally lying down. Her bed and pillows did not seem comfortable, and she felt for only an instant that her neck needed a little more support. She drifted off to sleep out of sheer exhaustion.

A New Day

Does Sandy remind you of anyone? The more stressful our lives become, the less we focus on the “moment.” When we aren’t conscious of how we sleep, breathe, stand, lift, bend or sit, our bodies can take a beating that results in lingering pain. We often avoid the early signs of discomfort we feel in our back, shoulders or neck until we are unable to ignore the pain. By reading the tips below, you can learn to make even the busiest days pain free.

- When you wake in the morning, start the day with a couple of stretches. Stand up and stretch your arms above your head. Do the “hug your best friend.” Wrap your arms around your body, and turn as far as you can to the left, then to the right.
- When performing everyday routines such as brushing your teeth, remember your posture. Do not hunch over the sink; stand up straight.
- Don’t bend from the waist when you lift a child. Squat with your back straight. Keep the child close to you and use your arms and legs to lift.
- Hold the telephone with your hand or use the speakerphone. Cradling the phone between your head and shoulder can lock up the spinal joints in the neck and upper back, eventually causing pain.
- While in the office, make sure your chair fits correct-

ly. There should be 2 inches between the front edge of your seat and the back of your knees. The chair should tilt back so you are able to rest while reading from a computer screen.

- Many people suffer from tension headaches. Adequate lighting and document holders by your computer can help reduce the risk of a headache. Materials placed on a desk cause you to constantly raise and lower your neck while you’re typing.
- Do not wear high heels. The weight of the foot is not evenly distributed, which not only causes sore feet, but also added spinal stress.
- Do not carry a heavy bag with its strap over your shoulder, unless you place the strap over your head on the side opposite the bag. Wearing a shoulder strap over one shoulder unevenly places the weight of the bag on one side of the body, potentially causing shoulder and back pain. Or better yet, carry a bag with a handle rather than a strap.
- Do not consistently cross the same knee over the other. This habit can eventually cause misalignment of the spine.
- Even if you remain sitting for the majority of your workday, you deserve a break. Get up from your desk and move around, stretching arms and legs as much as possible to avoid spinal stress.
- Bath time can be fun for the kids but stressful on any parent. Make certain to bend from the waist and not the back when bathing your children. Use your legs when you lift your child.
- It is important to get a good night’s rest. Choose a comfortable mattress and pillow that adequately support the weight of your head and body. ■

 American Chiropractic Association

For more information on prevention and wellness, or to find a doctor of chiropractic near you, go to the Patient Information section on ACA’s Web site at www.acatoday.org or call 800-986-4636.

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