



How Far Are You Cycling Today?

This month's article is by Gladys Schmidt, a long-time member of the coalition. Gladys has always enjoyed an active lifestyle, but during the last two years that has been curtailed due to a condition which, in our society, is becoming more and more prevalent, and in the future is expected to be epidemic. Here Gladys shares her experiences as well as ways to avoid the condition.



The question I am asked the most often by my friends and acquaintances is:

- Have you been doing a lot of cycling this summer?

or:

- Have you been cycling all over the world lately?

The answer to both questions is NO, I haven't been cycling.

So then I need to explain why not. I have Forward Head Posture (FHP) - you have what?

Let me go back to the beginning.

About two years ago I started getting strange and explosive headaches which would often leave as quickly as they started. Cycling and going walking brought them on, but sometimes they came on with reading or casual housework. I was convinced I had a brain tumor. The doctor sent me for an x-ray which ruled out a tumor or any brain pathology. As a result, the next year or so was a blur of:

- Specialists' visits
- Physiotherapy
- Chiropractic care
- Prolotherapy
- Acupuncture
- Massage
- Osteopathic treatments
- Personal trainer exercises at the gym



The first specialist I went to said, "You have a 75-year-old body with an 85-year-old neck and there is nothing we can do for you." Not good news. He said because of cell phones and computers, this condition will be epidemic in the next generation.

My physiotherapist gave my syndrome a name: Forward Head Posture (FHP). She said I had the true symptoms - not just a tendency towards. With a committed daily exercise program, I could get some strength and flexibility back. My neck muscles had shortened and weakened, and my job was to lengthen and strengthen them.

Finally I had something that I could research. I found out I was not the only one in the world with these unusual symptoms. Wikipedia says:

Forward head posture (FHP) is the anterior positioning of the cervical spine. This posture is sometimes called "Text Neck", "Scholar's Neck", "Wearsie Neck", "iHunch" or "Reading Neck."

It is a posture problem that is caused by several factors including sleeping with the head elevated too high, extended use of computers and cell phones, lack of developed back muscle strength and lack of nutrients such as calcium.

Possible negative effects include tingling and numbness in the arms, headache or migraine, and a burning pain between the shoulder blades.

Why did I get this? Is it reversible? I attribute the following to my situation. Some are beyond my control while others will take much effort to correct:

- Genetics
- Aging
- Two compressed disks (# 4 & #5) in my upper spine.
- Years of poor posture
- Osteoarthritis
- Overuse, as in cycling and quilting
- Perhaps the backpacking and hiking

Have you noticed how folks constantly have their heads down. I have watched people texting while walking, cycling, eating, or even while on dates? We are creating a society that has forgotten how to communicate eye to eye. This posture becomes a habit and I've seen young people walking on the street with their heads forward and down, even when not on their cell phones.

I read an interesting article while doing research. It said that our head weighs from 10-12 pounds. When you stand beside a plumb line, your ear, shoulder, and hip should be in a straight line. For every inch your ear is forward of the plumb line, add 10 pounds to the strain on your spine.

My ear is at least two inches forward of the plumb line, which means I am carrying 30 pounds on my neck. No wonder my head hurts as I'm walking and cycling. Straining to hold my head in place puts pressure on my back and shoulders, and impacts my posture. Sometimes when I am walking (even short distances), I help my neck by holding my chin with my hand and pushing up to alleviate the pressure and pain.

What can we do to prevent Text neck from happening to us, or to our children and grandchildren? Here are some things to think about:

- Look up <https://www.semisportmed.com/blog/preventing-forward-head-posture>.
- Do a postural check several times a day, especially while on the computer and cell and ensure that you stretch often throughout the day.
- Adjust the screen of your computer to a better position for your neck and if you use the computer for hours at a time, invest in a stand-up computer desk.
- For cyclists especially, check online for exercises to do before, during, and after cycling.
- Vary your position on the bike. Cut back on the distance you ride.
- Change the handlebars to a more upright position, even if it doesn't look cool.
- Limit the activities that you do with your head down for extended periods of time, especially those that you really enjoy. Quilting is one of those for me. I had to stop quilting for over a year. Now I am quilting most days but limiting the time I spend and ensuring that I stretch often.
- Locate a good gym that will assist you finding the right exercises and stretches for you, before things go wrong.
- Avoid overuse jobs such as vacuuming and washing floors. (If you hold your head erect, you won't see the dirt on the floor.)
- Be aware that hours of meal preparation at the kitchen counter is overuse. (Scrambled eggs work just fine. Going out for meals, or Meals on Wheels is good for FHP.)
- If you notice any symptoms, go to a physiotherapist for exercises,
- Of course eating healthy is always a must. Think about foods rich in calcium. Milk products are full of calcium, but if you are on a non-dairy diet, include the following foods: sardines, soy products, almonds, green beans, amaranth seeds, spinach, and tomatoes.

I do hope this article will help those who are feeling that they need a boost in their cycling health. Never take good health for granted. Overdoing anything may be damaging, especially as we age. Remember to take care of yourself and Safe cycling!