

## Is Your Vision Causing Muscle Tension?

Mary Betts Sinclair

Do you have tension headaches or chronic tension in your upper body? How about neck and shoulder stiffness? Maybe you experience strain in the temples, forehead, neck, shoulders, or back, especially after a long period of working at a computer or reading a book? If so, your tension could be related to how you look at the world.

Healthy vision is comfortable, efficient, and relaxed for the viewer, while poor visual habits can interfere with free and easy movement, making the body chronically tense. We use our eyes much of the day, and if we strain to see, we create tension in the face, neck, shoulders, and back muscles. Squinting and straining when we have trouble

few years of life. A lazy eye, for example, may cause a child to hike up one eye or one shoulder, or twist the neck to look out of the better-sighted eye at all times. Being sensitive to light might cause a child to develop the habit of hanging the head forward. Injuries to or near the eyes can also cause chronic tension in the muscles of the eyes or structures near the eyes. And finally, emotional stress can cause us to hold our muscles tight while we look out at the world.

### What To Do

#### STEP ONE

Talk with your massage therapist about your pain and strain. During a session, your therapist can check you for extra

*Write it on  
your heart that  
every day is the  
best day in the  
year.*

-Ralph W. Emerson



Poor visual habits can interfere with free and easy movement

making something out, or stiffening our entire neck, spine, and pelvis every time we look up can affect the entire body.

Most of us develop these vision habits without even being aware of them, but there are other health factors that can play a role. Up to 5 percent of children are born with some kind of visual abnormality, or develop one in the first

tension in and around the eyes, neck, and shoulders, then fine-tune massage techniques to help relieve your discomfort. Relaxation exercises, as well as hot and cold packs, can offer additional relief.

#### STEP TWO

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### Office Hours and Contact

218-263-1501

[www.ohanatherapeutic.com](http://www.ohanatherapeutic.com)

E/O Mon: 11am-6pm

Tues: 9am-1:30pm

Wed. & Thurs: 11am - 6pm

E/O Fri: 9am-1:30pm

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Do daily eye muscle stretches, practice self-massage, and use hot and cold packs over your eyes. Your massage therapist can show you how to use these easy, inexpensive aids.

#### STEP THREE

Your bodyworker may also refer you to another health-care professional who can help you reduce built-up tension. For example, a behavioral optometrist can check to make sure your glasses are the right prescription and help you learn better visual habits; a Feldenkrais practitioner can help you change old habits, see with less strain, and understand how emotional stress might be affecting your eyes; and an ergonomic expert can help adapt your office workstation so that it protects and does not strain your eyes.

## Relief for Computer Users

According to the American Optometric Association, 46 percent of Americans spend at least 5 hours a day on a computer or smartphone. When looking at a screen, many people hold their head forward of center and slouch, which puts many upper-body muscles in a shortened position. These visual habits are now creating whole-body strain. In addition to head-forward posture, prolonged twisting of the head can tighten muscles in the back of the neck. At the computer, the greater the glare, the smaller the font size, and the poorer the resolution, the more likely it is that the person will strain to see and develop tightness in the upper shoulders.

Here are some ways to avoid pain and strain:

Computer users tend to blink very little and stare straight ahead, not using their peripheral vision. Be sure to keep blinking, which washes your eyes in naturally therapeutic tears and breaks up your stare.

Take frequent rest breaks using the 20-20 Rule: every 20 minutes, spend 20 seconds looking at something far away, preferably gazing out a window. Also, stand up and move as much as possible. This is a great time to do eye-muscle stretches and range-of-motion exercises for your back and neck. Use your fingertips to gently massage around your eyes, temples, and

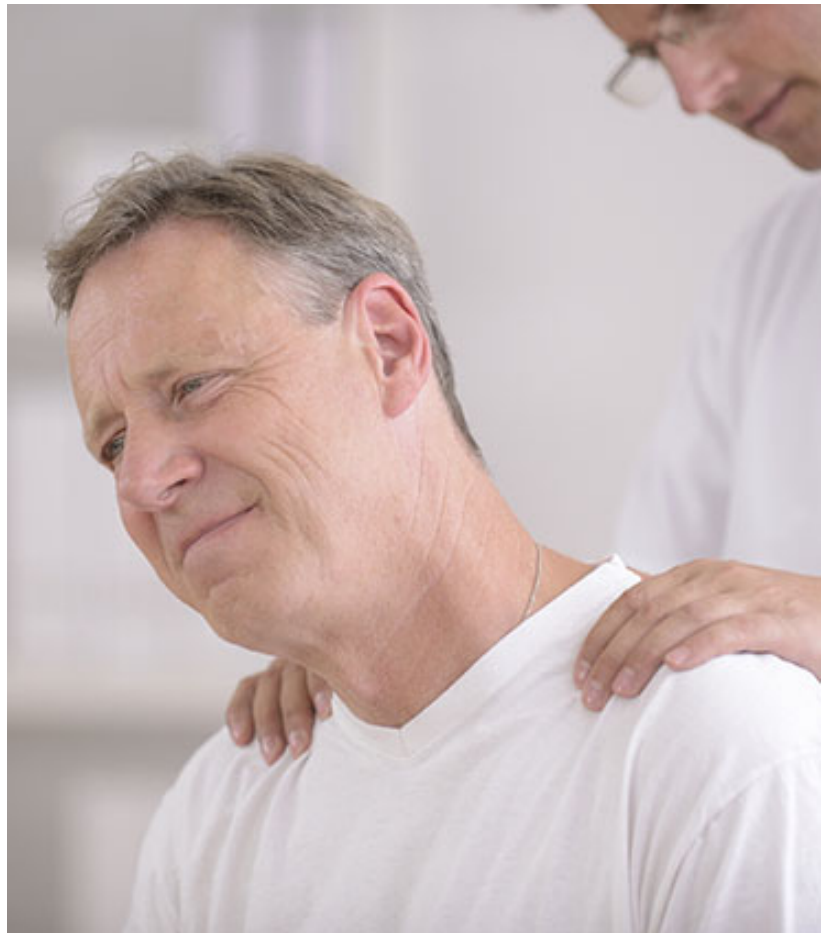
forehead. Finally, rub your palms together and gently cup your closed eyes. Relax and breathe freely.

Make sure you have good light, and check that your monitor is the correct distance away from your eyes and at the right height. Also, adjust the screen settings to where they are comfortable in terms of resolution and flicker.

If you wear eyeglasses, have them checked. For example, in order for some people to see clearly with their heads held in an upright and balanced position, without chronic tightness in the back of the neck, they may need to have a prescription for a longer focal length or larger bifocal inserts, or have an adjustment of their eyeglass frames if they are bent or twisted. Some people may need a stronger or weaker prescription. If your doctor has prescribed a pair of glasses specifically

for seeing the computer screen, wear them.

*Mary Betts Sinclair is an Oregon-based educator and bodyworker. Learn more about her at [www.marybettssinclair.com](http://www.marybettssinclair.com).*



**Your massage therapist can check for tension**

# Stop Biting Your Nails

Breaking a nail is one thing. Breaking a nail-biting habit is another. According to the American Academy of Dermatology, nail biting typically begins in childhood and can continue through adulthood, and the side effects can be more than cosmetic.

## HOW TO STOP BITING YOUR NAILS

"Chronic nail biting can cause serious problems," says board-certified dermatologist Margaret E. Parsons, MD, FAAD, associate clinical professor of dermatology at the University of California, Davis. "Repeated nail biting can damage the tissue that makes nails grow, resulting in abnormal-looking nails. It can also leave you vulnerable to infection as you pass harmful bacteria and viruses from your mouth to your fingers and from your nails to your face and mouth."

To help nail-biters kick the habit, Parsons recommends these tips:

1. Keep nails trimmed short: Having less nail provides less to bite and is less

tempting.

2. Apply bitter-tasting nail polish to your nails: This safe but awful-tasting formula discourages nail biting.

3. Get regular manicures: Spending money to keep your nails looking attractive may make you less likely to bite them. Alternatively, cover your nails with tape or stickers or wear gloves to prevent biting.

4. Replace nail biting with a good habit: When you feel like biting your nails, try playing with a stress ball instead to keep your hands busy and away from your mouth.

5. Identify your triggers: These could be physical triggers, such as the presence of hangnails, or other triggers, like boredom, stress, or anxiety. By figuring out what causes you to bite your nails, you can figure out how to avoid these situations.

6. Try to gradually stop biting your nails: Some doctors recommend taking a gradual approach to break the habit. Try to stop biting one set of nails, such as your thumbnails, first. When that's

successful, move on to the next.

"For some people, nail biting may be a sign of a more serious psychological or emotional problem," Parsons says. "If you've repeatedly tried to quit and the problem persists, consult a doctor."



Nail biting can lead to a host of problems.

# Exercise Myths

## Fiction Vs. Fact

Although old fitness fictions like "no pain, no gain" are fading fast, plenty of misconceptions still exist. Following are some of the most common myths, counteracted by the latest research.

**FICTION:** YOU WILL BURN MORE FAT IF YOU EXERCISE LONGER AT A LOWER INTENSITY.

**FACT:** The most important focus in exercise and weight control is how many calories are burned during the activity. The faster you walk, step or run, the more calories you use per minute. However, high-intensity exercise may be more difficult to sustain.

**FICTION:** IF YOU'RE NOT GOING TO WORK OUT HARD AND OFTEN, EXERCISE IS A WASTE OF TIME.

**FACT:** Any exercise is better than none. For example, regular walking or

gardening for as little as an hour a week has been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease.

**FICTION:** IF YOU EXERCISE LONG AND HARD ENOUGH, YOU WILL ALWAYS GET THE RESULTS YOU WANT.

**FACT:** In reality, genetics plays an important role in how people respond to exercise. Your development of strength, speed, and endurance may be very different from that of other people you know.

**FICTION:** THE HEALTH AND FITNESS BENEFITS OF MIND-BODY EXERCISE LIKE T'AI CHI AND YOGA ARE QUESTIONABLE.

**FACT:** The benefits abound! T'ai Chi, for example, has been shown to help treat low-back pain and fibromyalgia. Improved flexibility, strength, and stress management are just some of the

benefits.

**FICTION:** HOME WORKOUTS ARE FINE, BUT GOING TO A GYM IS THE BEST WAY TO GET FIT.

**FACT:** Some people find it easier to stick to a home-based fitness program. In spite of all the hype on trendy exercise programs and facilities, the best program for you is the one you will participate in consistently.

This information was provided by IDEA, [www.ideafit.com](http://www.ideafit.com).

*The new year  
stands before us,  
like a chapter in  
a book, waiting  
to be written.*

*We can help  
write that story  
by setting goals.*

-Melody Beattie

#### UPCOMING HOURS

E/O Monday (1/13, 1/27, 2/10, etc.): 11am - 6pm

Tuesdays: 9am - 1:30pm

Wednesdays: 11am - 6pm

Thursdays: 11am - 6pm

E/O Friday (1/10, 1/24, 2/7, etc.): 9am - 1:30pm

#### OFFICE HOURS ADJUSTMENT:

As we transition to a New Year, we wanted to let you know that our office hours have changed. We will have someone at the front desk on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 11am - 5pm. Tuesdays and Fridays we will be available by appointment only.

Thank you for your patience as we navigate through life's changes.

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## Empowering you to heal yourself

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