



POSTURAL ALIGNMENT & EXERCISES TO COMBAT

HEADACHES & MIGRAINES

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INTRODUCTION

THIS BOOK IS NOT INTENDED TO TALK ABOUT THE SPECIFIC TYPES OF HEADACHES OR MIGRAINES. THE INTENTION IS TO GIVE THE READER EXERCISES THAT ARE MEANT TO PROVIDE AN ALTERNATIVE TO HEADACHE AND MIGRAINE RELIEF.



DISCLAIMER

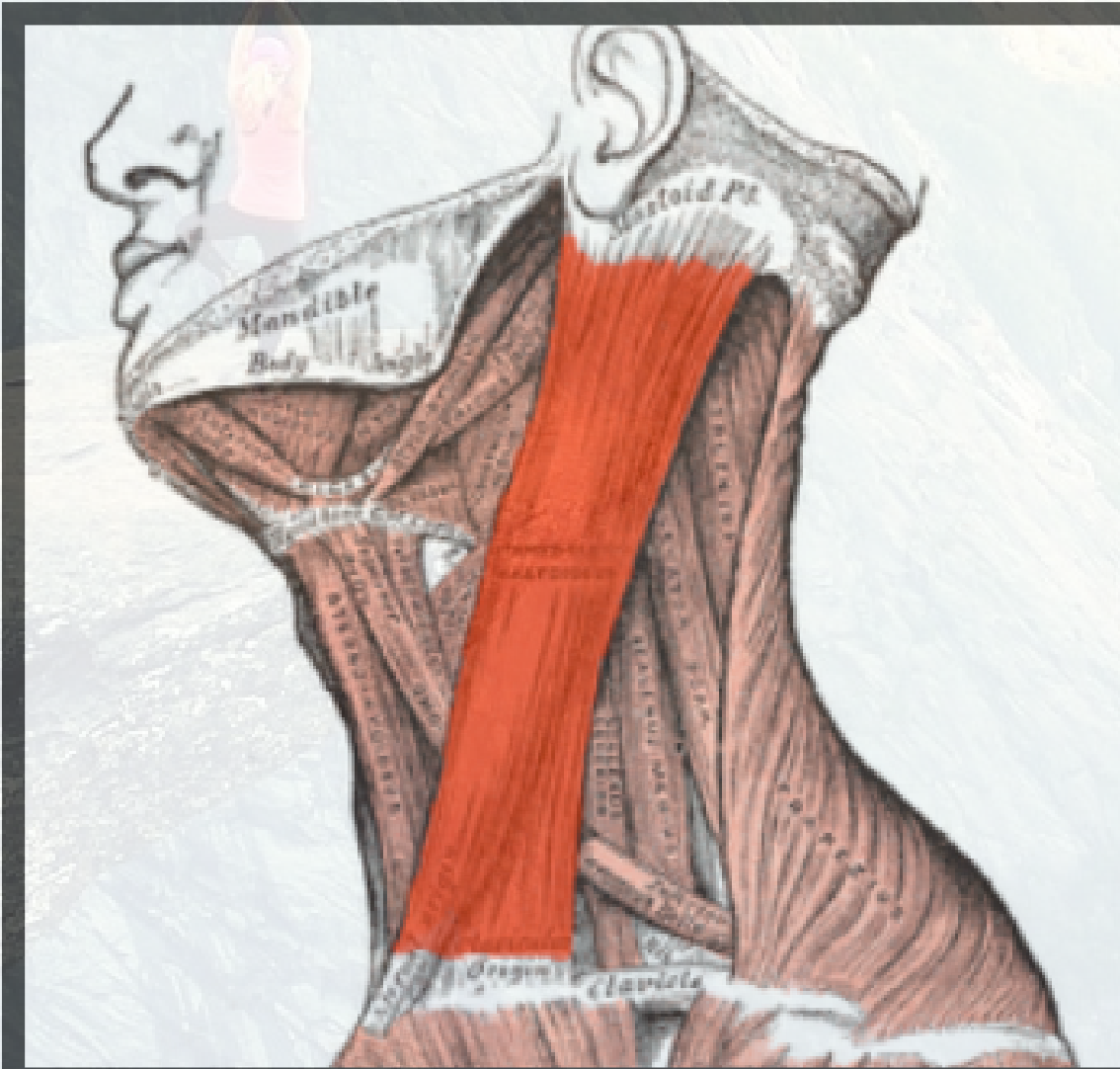
Nothing in this book is guaranteed, but you might just experience relief of, or eliminate headaches and/or migraines altogether. Proceed at your own risk. If any of these exercises increase pain, please decrease the intensity of the exercise or eliminate altogether.

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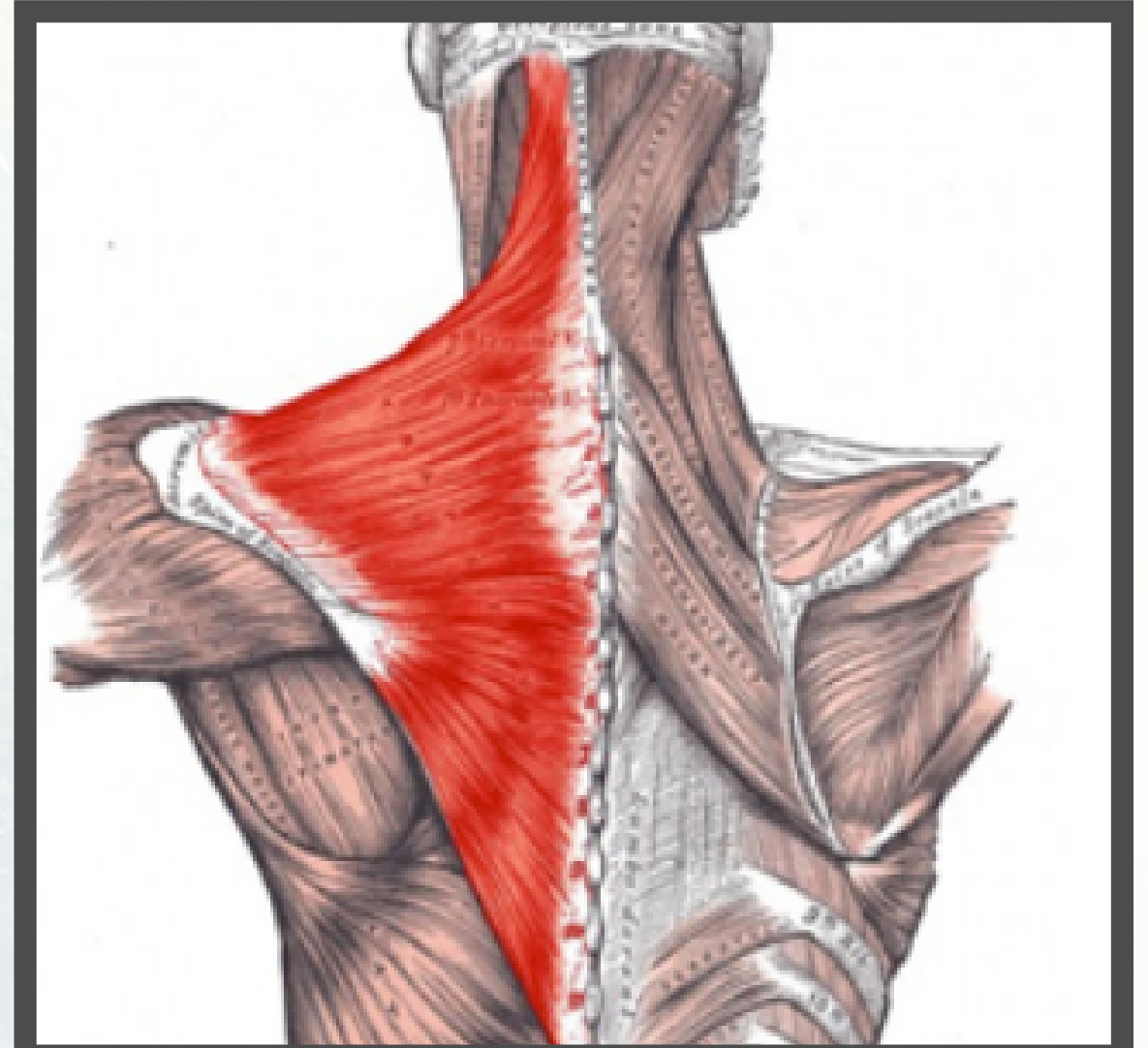
POSTURE

Posture is a major aspect in driving headaches. It is typically an accumulation of poor posture over a long period of time that sets us up for headaches/migraines. There are four muscles/muscle groups known to be the main drivers of muscle tension in headaches and they become problematic with poor posture. See the pictures below:

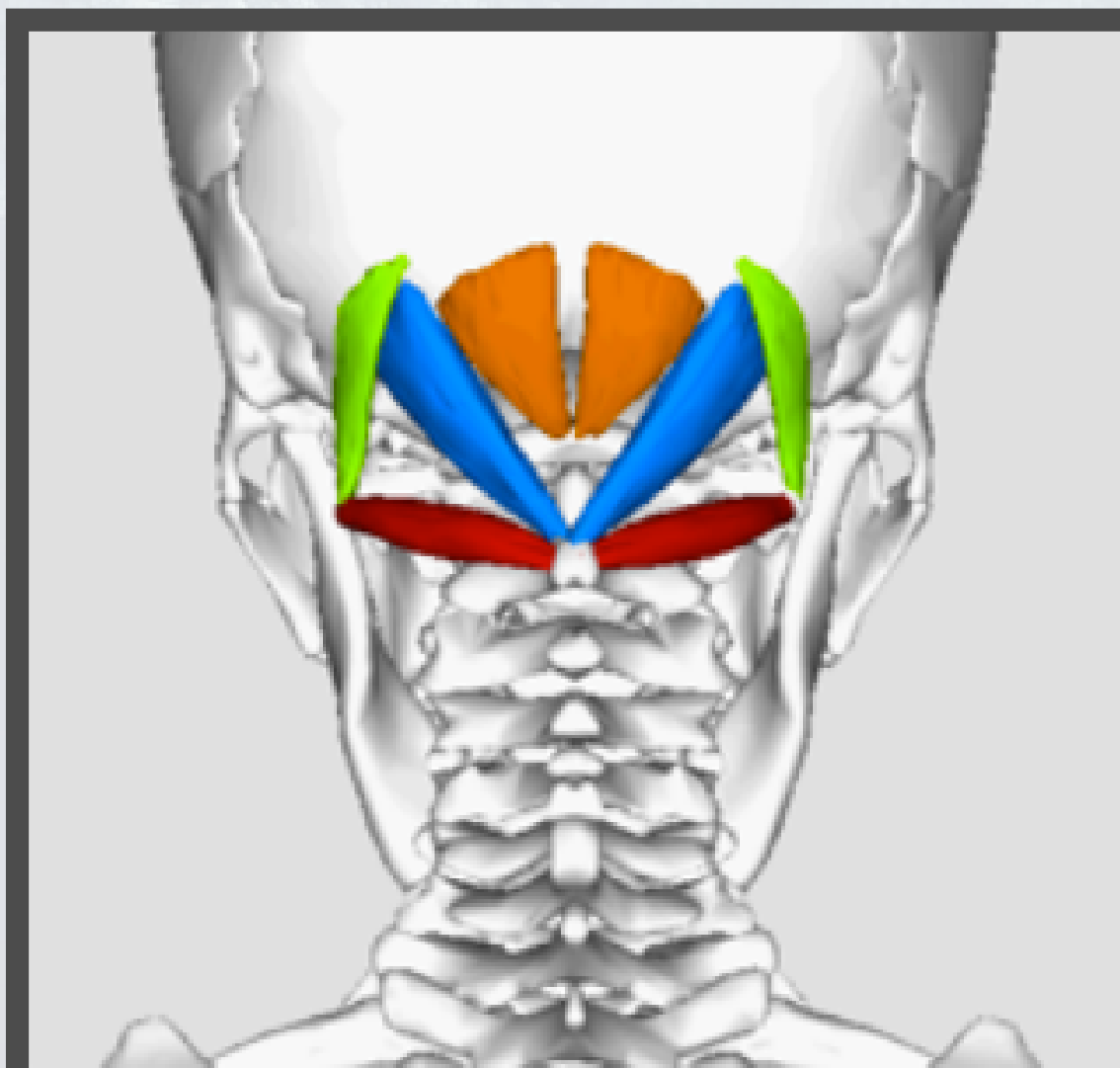
Sternocleidomastoid



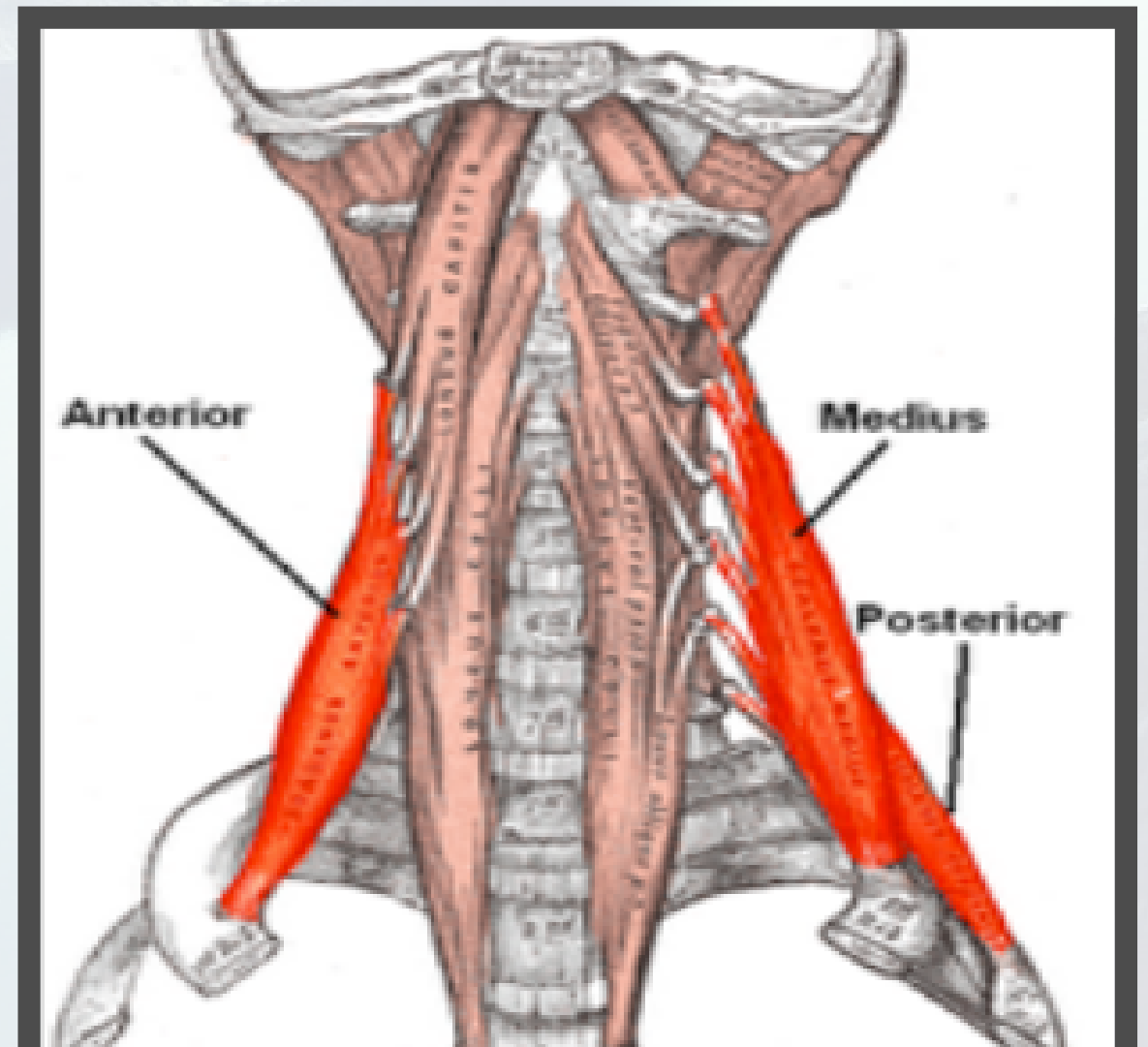
Upper Trapezius



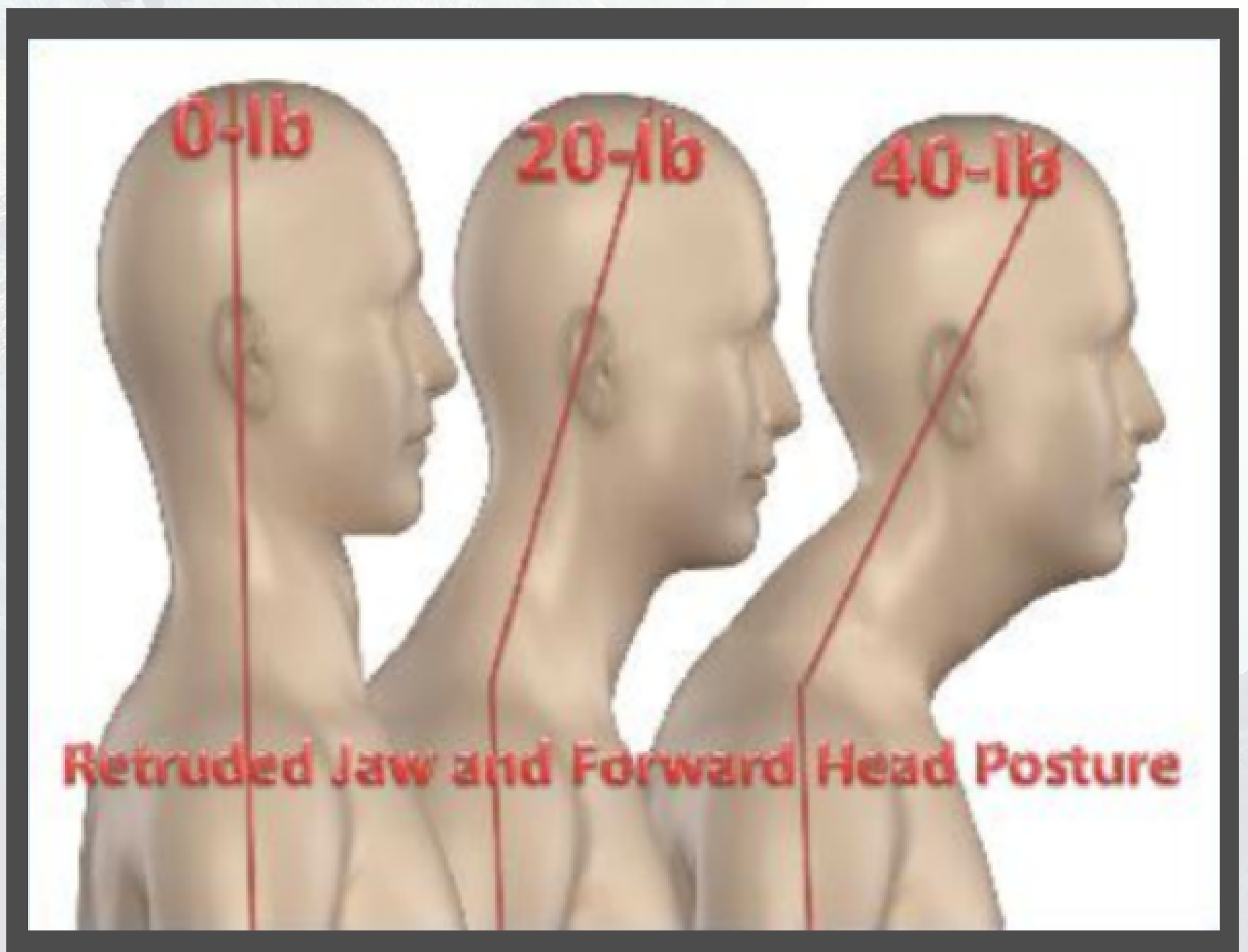
Sub Occipital Muscles



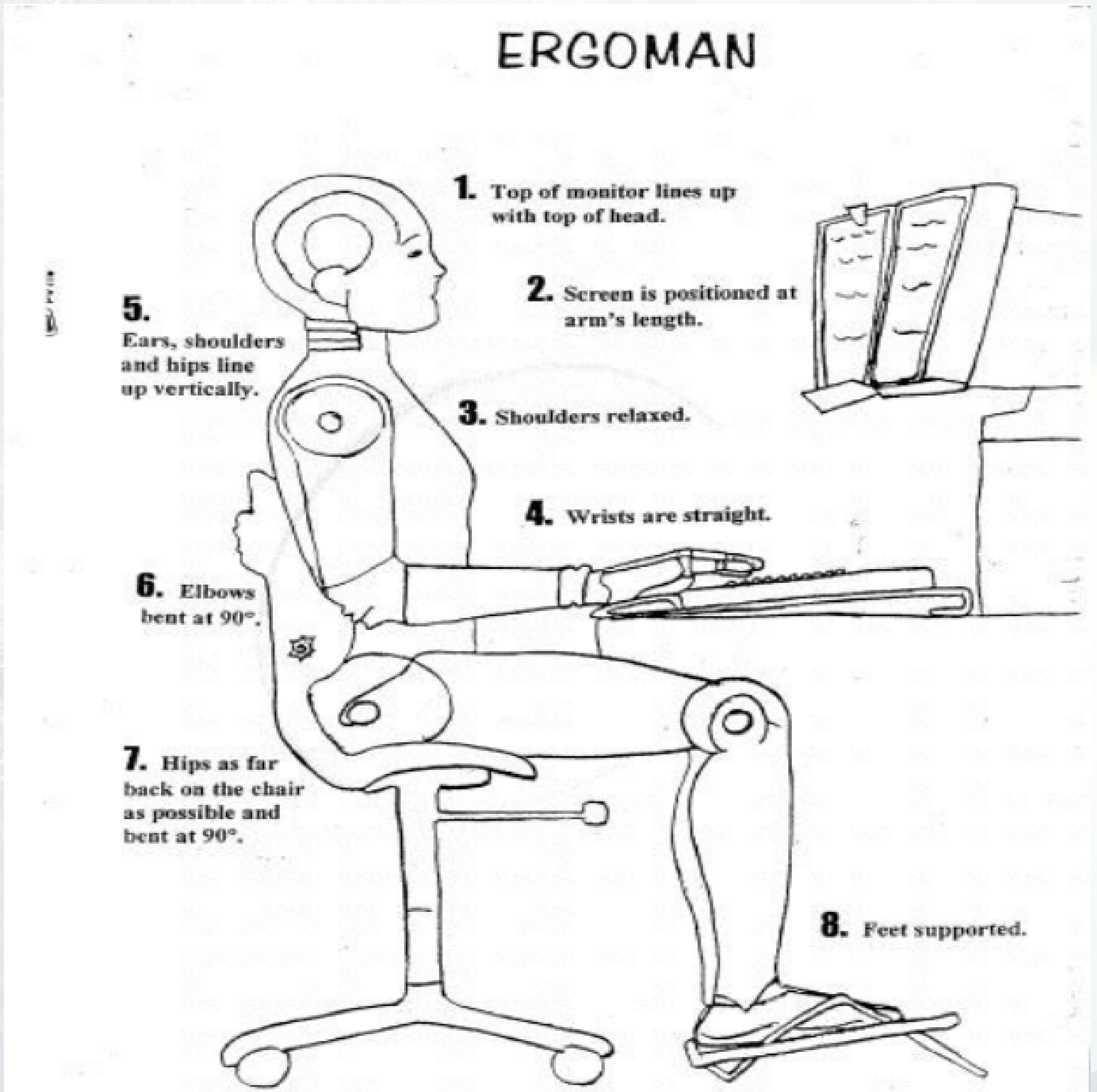
Scalene Muscles



In the figure below, you can see that as posture deteriorates, the head becomes heavier to hold upright, making it harder for these muscles to do their jobs. When a muscle is worked beyond its capacity, the most common reaction is to create tension. Try to picture the muscles from the previous page on the model below to see how they work differently as posture changes. Take note of how the muscles lengthen and shorten, and also see where they attach, as this is a good indicator of where the symptoms may originate.



The figure below is a great example of how to set up your computer desk, which will decrease the amount of time you have poor posture:



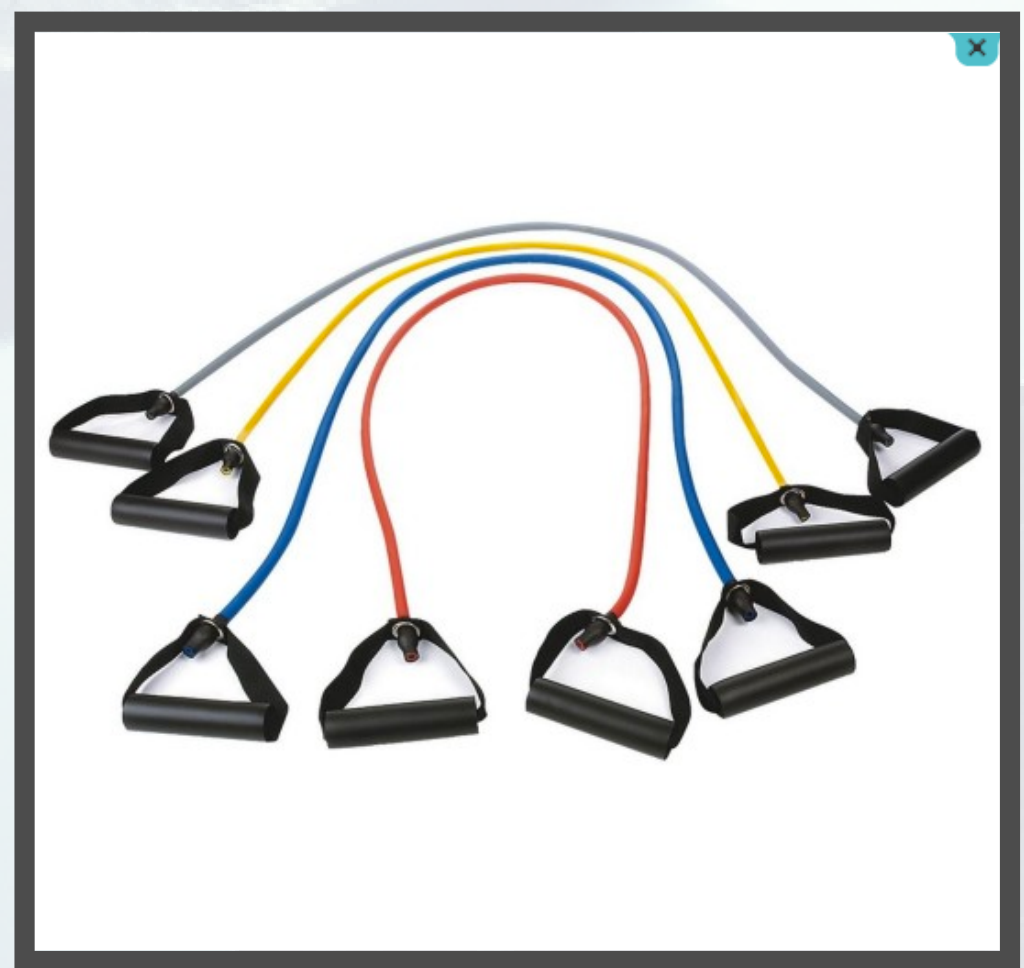
A great addition to these furniture updates is to get up and stand or walk...anything to pull yourself out of the forward position every 15 minutes when at a workstation.

EXERCISES THAT HELP WITH HEADACHES AND MIGRAINES

Now, don't worry, these exercises do not require a warm up or cool down; they will effectively start and end your day right! These exercises have been shown to promote the correct body mechanics of posture. They will address the muscles that have been described in the previous pages of this book as they have large part in you controlling your daily posture. Typically, it takes many years to achieve poor posture, so it may take some time to reverse those effects. Give it at least 6 weeks of consistently performing these exercises to see the changes you are looking for. Also, for those of you that work at a computer desk, utilize the Ergoman desk set up on the previous page to put your hard work to practice.

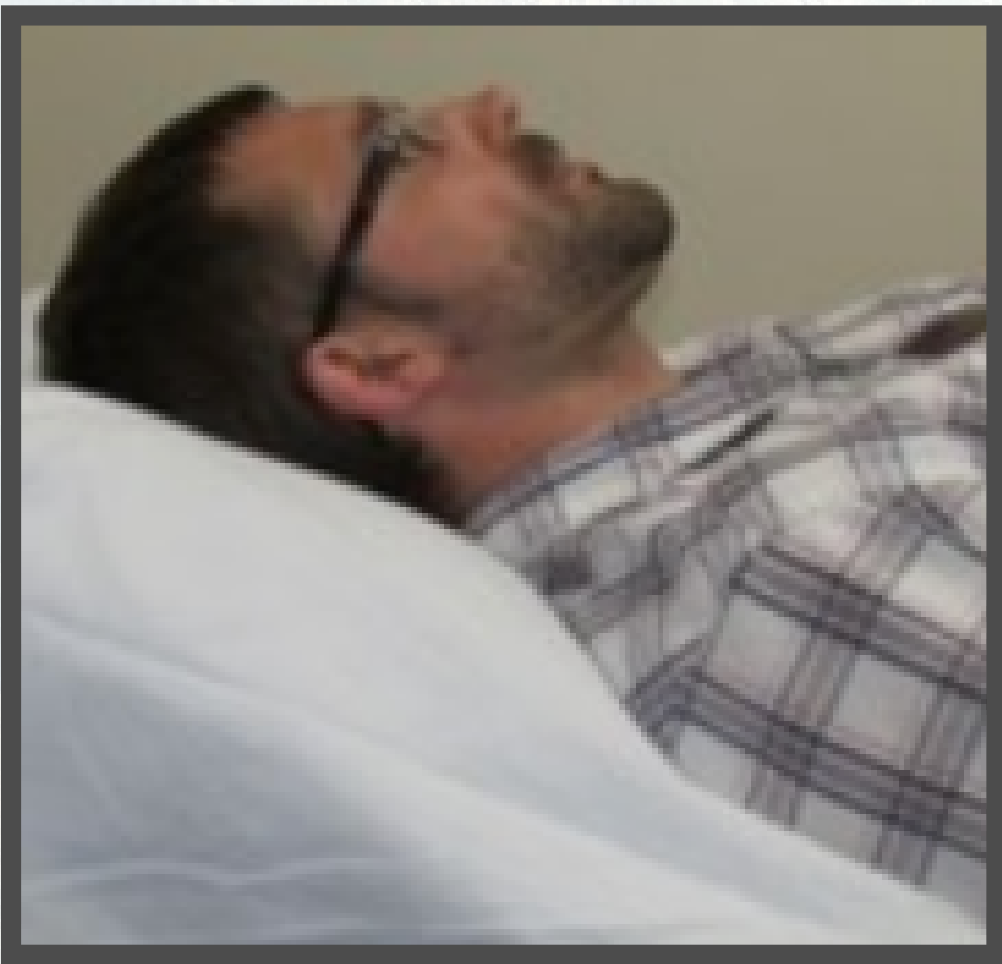
Equipment needed:

- Foam roll
- Elastic exercise bands/pulleys on your home gym.



EXERCISE: CHIN TUCKS

Your neck has a “core”. This muscle is the Longus colli, and will shut down with pain and/or neck dysfunction. When this muscle is not doing its job, the bigger “mover” muscles take over and they can become fatigued, which results in a guarded/shortened state. This muscle tension can create headaches.



Position: Lie on your back with your knees bent, or place a pillow under your knees. The neck needs to be in a neutral position, which means that it should not be tilted back, nor should your chin be touching your neck. Find a place in the middle of these two extremes and use pillows if needed.

Technique: Starting at the position described above, tuck your chin down, to give yourself a “double chin.” Imagine there is a pole going through your temples and you use that as your axis to tuck your chin. All muscles need to be relaxed;

YOU CAN TEST THIS BY PRESSING ON THE MUSCLES ON EITHER SIDE OF YOUR THROAT TO ASSESS IF THEY ARE ACTIVATED OR NOT. HOLD THIS CHIN TUCK POSITION FOR 10 SECONDS AND THEN FULLY RELAX BACK INTO THE STARTING POSITION.

REPETITIONS: PERFORM 10-15 REPETITIONS IN THE MORNING, BEFORE YOU GET OUT OF BED, AND AT NIGHT, BEFORE YOU GO TO SLEEP.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION: WHILE THIS EXERCISE IS PRESENTED AS BEING PERFORMED WHILE LYING ON YOUR BACK, IT CAN BE DONE THROUGHOUT THE DAY IN STANDING AND SITTING POSITIONS. IT HELPS TEACH GOOD HEAD AND NECK POSTURE WHILE SITTING AT A WORKSTATION, WHILE DRIVING, AND WHILE PERFORMING UPPER BODY EXERCISES AS WELL!

EXERCISE: FOAM ROLL STRETCHING/MOBILIZATION

Posture is affected by the muscles in the chest and trunk. Gravity does a really good job of bringing us forward.

We all need to exercise in a way that will counteract what gravity is doing by lengthening and stretching specific muscles to create and maintain good spinal mobility.

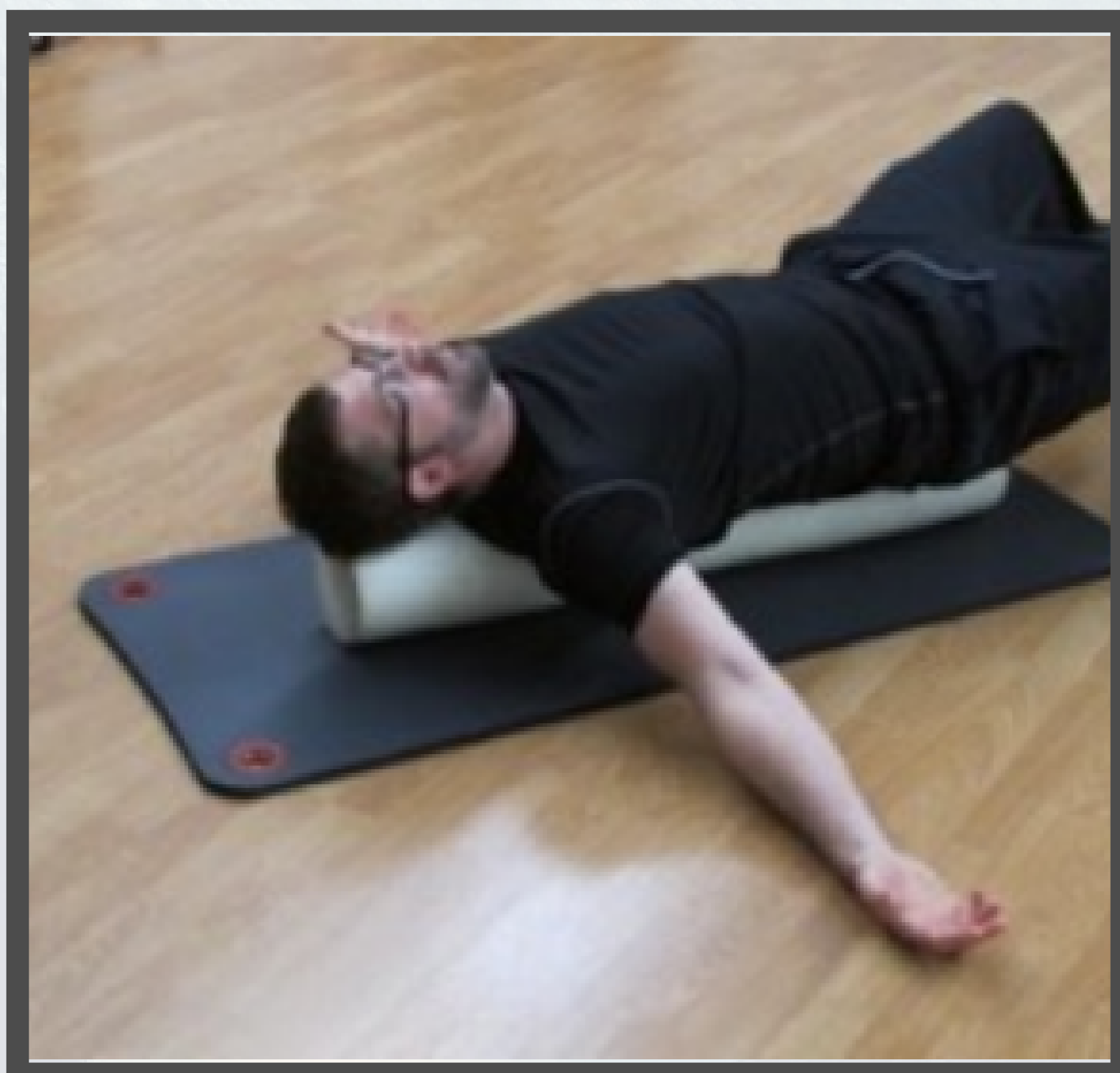
One of the best pieces of exercise equipment to get is a foam roll (one can be

found on Amazon.com). Make sure you get one that is 36 inches long with a 6-inch diameter. As an alternative you may also use two bath towels rolled lengthwise; this will accomplish the same goal but will be less aggressive. Less aggressive may be the best way to start as the foam roller can be uncomfortable in the beginning.

Use the foam roller in both vertical and horizontal positions (see photos below). These two positions will focus on different aspects of spinal mobility and postural flexibility.

Warning You may be sore the first few times as you are stretching and mobilizing into positions that are new to your body.

A) VERTICAL STRETCHING WITH FOAM ROLL



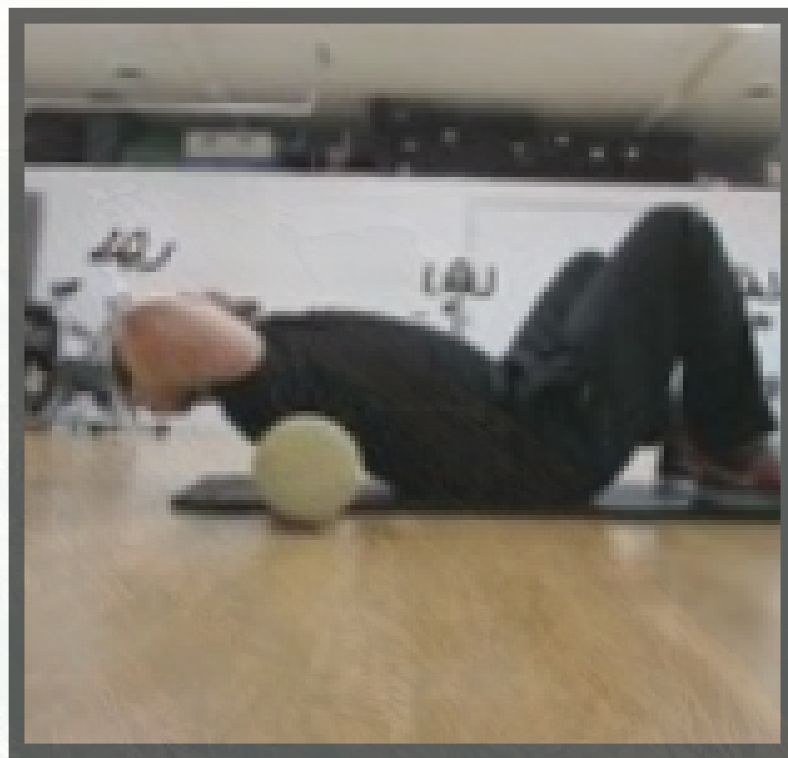
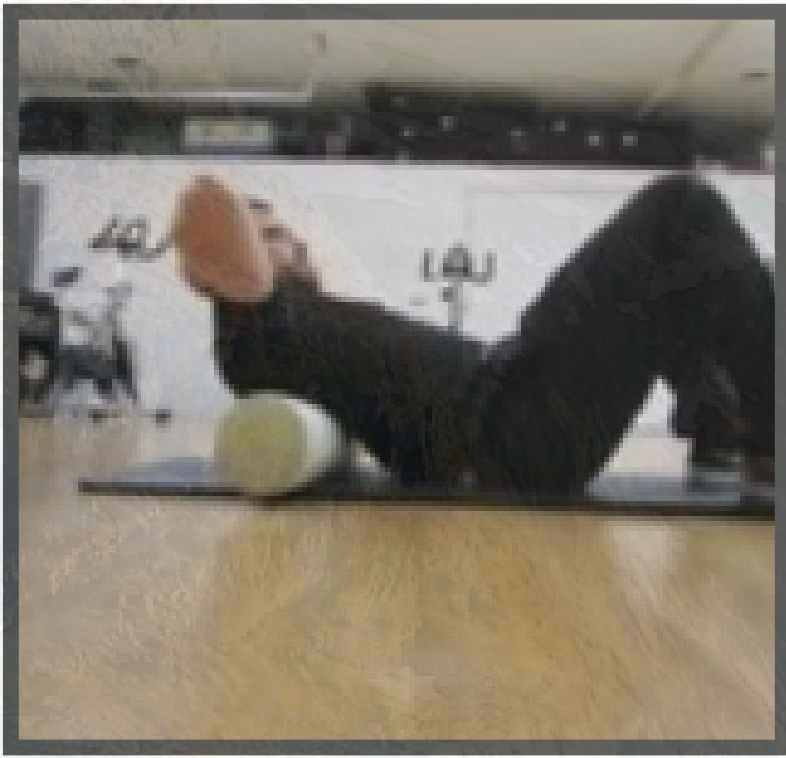
Position: Lie on your back with the foam roll in line with your spine. Make sure that your head and tailbone are on the foam roll. If you are unable to lay your head on the foam roll with your neck in a neutral position then use pillows to obtain the neutral position. In other words, do not leave your head tilted back when you are on the foam roll. Be sure you keep your knees bent with feet flat on the ground. Now, spread your arms out to each side with them resting on the ground with palms facing up.

Technique: Raise your arms up until you find yourself feeling a medium stretch near your armpits (might also feel a stretch across your chest). Remember, nothing more than a MEDIUM stretch is to be felt. You will thank me later.

Repetitions: Hold this position for at least 15-20 seconds in the morning and at night. You can perform this as long as you want and as many times in a day you would like.

Practical application: This is a good “reset” at any time during the day because 90% of what we do in our day is usually in a forward position. This exercise will do a great job of stretching your pectoralis muscles, which are powerful muscles. If you experience pain with this position, then lower your arms closer to your waist until you have no pain and feel just a stretch. If this does not work, then simply rest your hands on your belly FOR THE SAME RESULT.

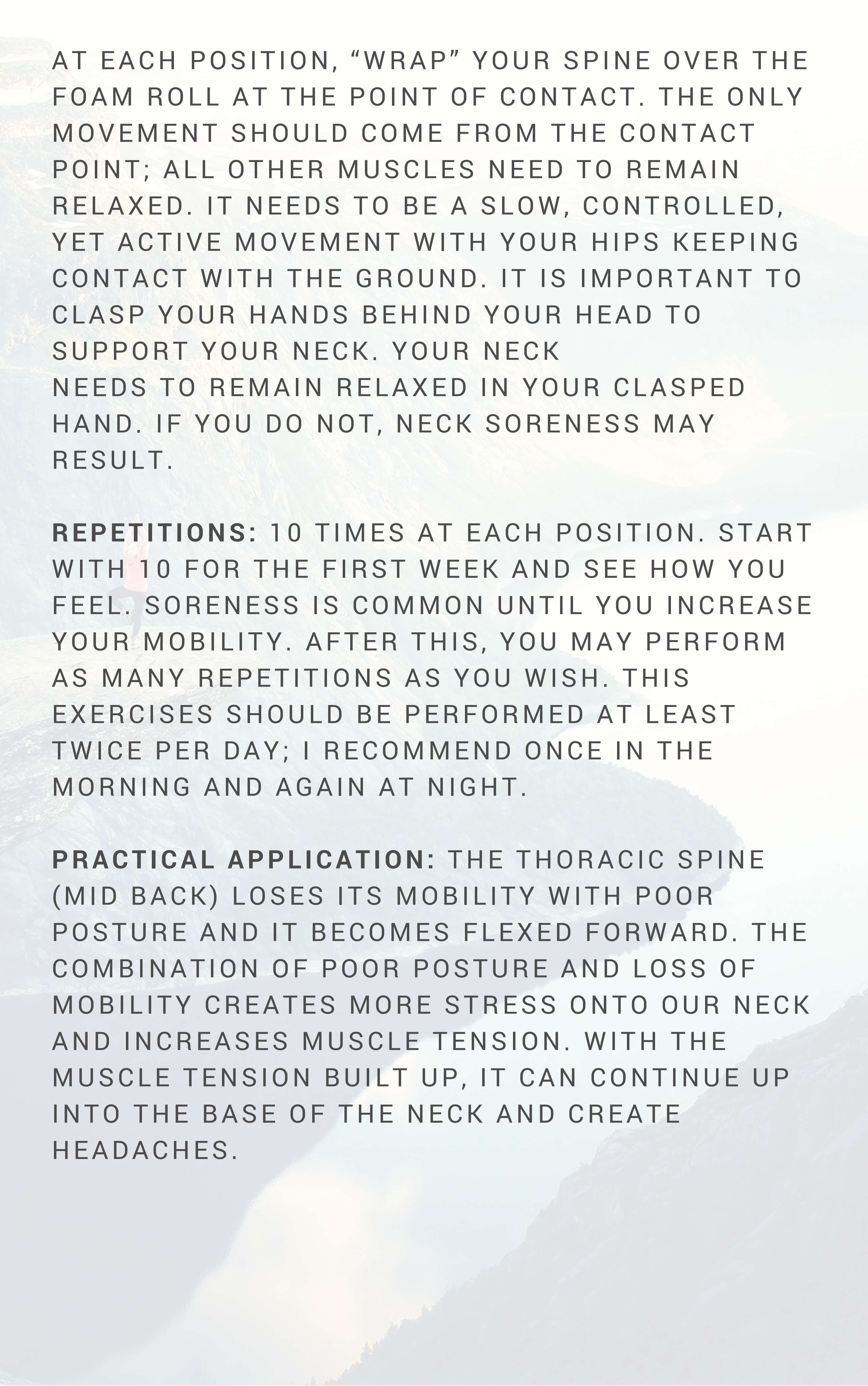
A) HORIZONTAL STRETCHING WITH FOAM ROLL



YOUTUBE: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1wBGp-XYHw>

Position: Place the foam roll horizontally underneath your shoulder blades. Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the ground, keeping your hips resting on the ground. Clasp your hands together and place them on the back of your head/neck, which will keep your neck from being involved in the exercises. Note that you may be uncomfortable if the foam roll is placed lower than your shoulder blades.

Technique: There are 3 places where you will place the foam roll: top of shoulder blade, middle shoulder blade, and lowest part of shoulder blade. Sometimes just the top and bottom of the shoulder blades will be sufficient, depending upon the individual, for example, a 6' 7" tall individual will use all three positions, where someone who is 5' 2" tall will just use two of the positions.

A person is shown from the side, performing a foam roller exercise on a dirt trail. They are lying on their back with their knees bent and feet flat on the ground. A pink foam roller is positioned under their mid-back. The person's hands are clasped behind their head, and their neck is relaxed. The background shows a steep, rocky mountain slope under a clear sky.

AT EACH POSITION, “WRAP” YOUR SPINE OVER THE FOAM ROLL AT THE POINT OF CONTACT. THE ONLY MOVEMENT SHOULD COME FROM THE CONTACT POINT; ALL OTHER MUSCLES NEED TO REMAIN RELAXED. IT NEEDS TO BE A SLOW, CONTROLLED, YET ACTIVE MOVEMENT WITH YOUR HIPS KEEPING CONTACT WITH THE GROUND. IT IS IMPORTANT TO CLASP YOUR HANDS BEHIND YOUR HEAD TO SUPPORT YOUR NECK. YOUR NECK NEEDS TO REMAIN RELAXED IN YOUR CLASPED HAND. IF YOU DO NOT, NECK SORENESS MAY RESULT.

REPETITIONS: 10 TIMES AT EACH POSITION. START WITH 10 FOR THE FIRST WEEK AND SEE HOW YOU FEEL. SORENESS IS COMMON UNTIL YOU INCREASE YOUR MOBILITY. AFTER THIS, YOU MAY PERFORM AS MANY REPETITIONS AS YOU WISH. THIS EXERCISES SHOULD BE PERFORMED AT LEAST TWICE PER DAY; I RECOMMEND ONCE IN THE MORNING AND AGAIN AT NIGHT.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION: THE THORACIC SPINE (MID BACK) LOSES ITS MOBILITY WITH POOR POSTURE AND IT BECOMES FLEXED FORWARD. THE COMBINATION OF POOR POSTURE AND LOSS OF MOBILITY CREATES MORE STRESS ONTO OUR NECK AND INCREASES MUSCLE TENSION. WITH THE MUSCLE TENSION BUILT UP, IT CAN CONTINUE UP INTO THE BASE OF THE NECK AND CREATE HEADACHES.

EXERCISE: NECK STRETCHES



Position: Either sitting or standing. When seated, sit on your hands. When standing, clasp your hands together behind your back. Start with good posture and your eyes looking straight ahead.

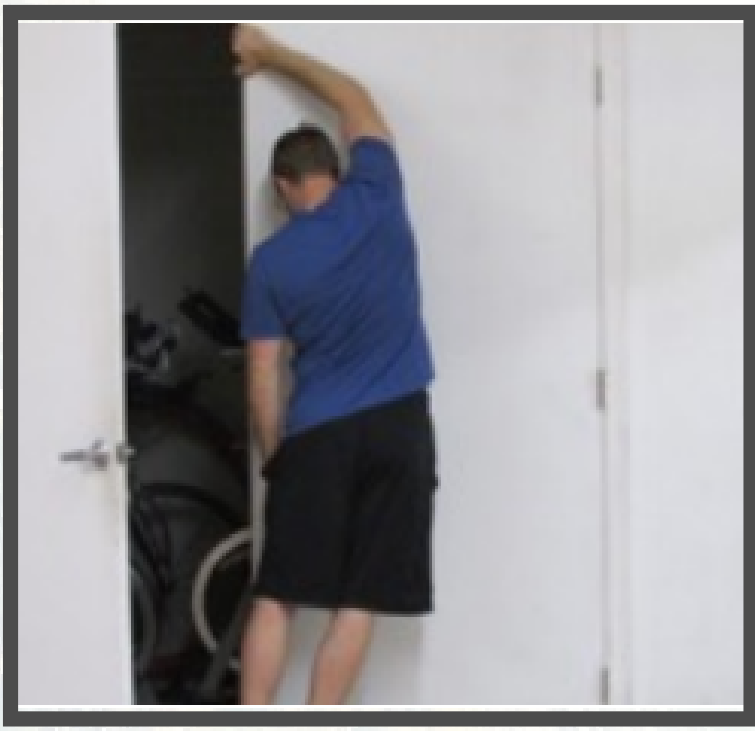
Technique: Tilt your head to one side until you feel a medium stretch on the opposite side. Hold this for 30 seconds at least. Next, while in this head tilted position; turn your head away from the side that you are tilted so that you are looking “up and away.” Hold this for 30 seconds as well. Apply gentle resistance with the hand on the same side that you are tilting your head. Remember, only a gentle pressure at first. You may apply more resistance as time goes on in order to feel a stretch.

Repetitions: As many as you can in a day! Hold for at least 30 seconds to get the stretch you deserve.

Practical Application:

This stretches the Upper Trapezius and Scalene muscles, so they are perfect to do while driving, sitting, standing or just plain bored while waiting in the line at the DMV..

EXERCISE: THE WALL LAT STRETCH



YOUTUBE:

- Right side
- Left Side

POSITION: All you need is a doorway with 3-4 feet of clearance on each side.

PLACE YOUR FEET TOGETHER AND IN LINE WITH AND FACING THE DOOR JAMB. TAKE YOUR RIGHT HAND AND GRAB AS HIGH AS YOU CAN ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE DOOR JAMB. THIS IS THE STARTING POSITION FOR STRETCHING YOUR RIGHT SIDE. YOU WILL DO THE OPPOSITE FOR STRETCHING YOUR LEFT SIDE.

Technique: Lean to the side of the hand that is holding the door jamb. Imagine that your hand and feet are anchor points, and your hips are a weight that is hanging from those anchor points out to the side. You need to feel a stretch between your armpit and your hip. You may feel the stretch at any section between these points or maybe the full distance. It may also vary from side to side with the location of stretch as well as the intensity.

Repetitions: Perform 2-3 sets of 1 minute each side per day.

Practical Application: The Latissimus Dorsi muscle is a powerful muscle can work with the pectoralis muscles to create forward posture when they are shortened.

EXERCISE: STOMACH/SHOULDER BLADE SQUEEZES



YOUTUBE:
VIEW
EXERCISE

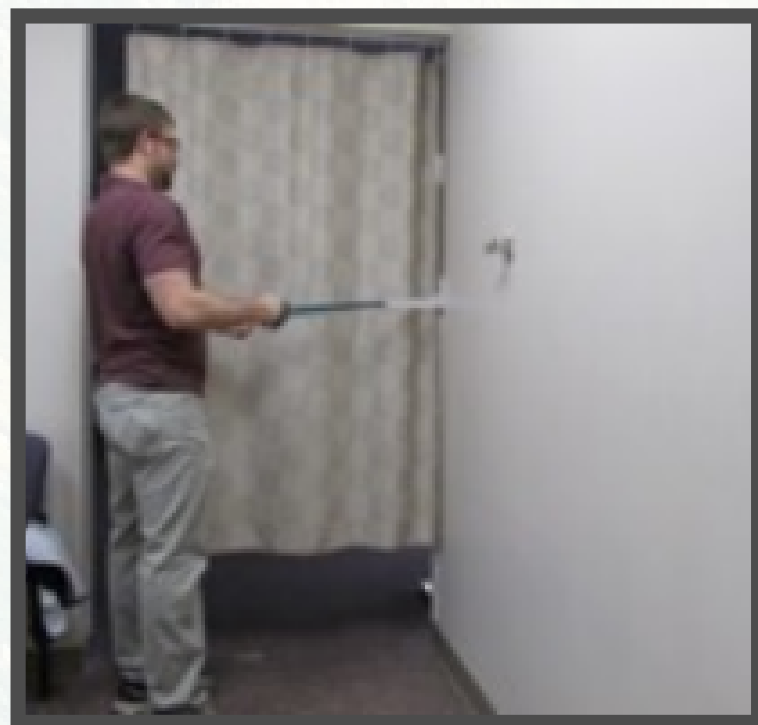
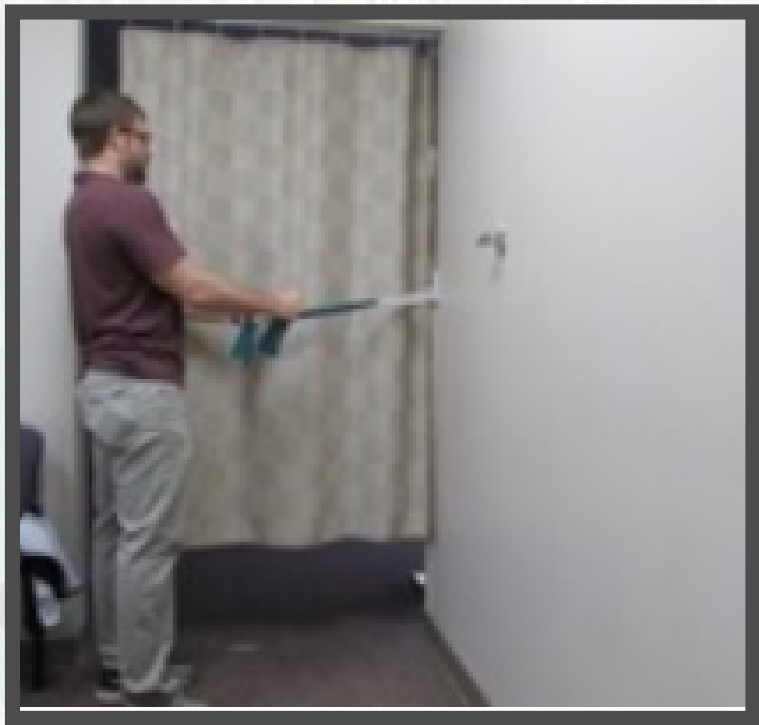
POSITION: Lie on your stomach in a position that allows your head to be in a neutral position (versus being turned to one side or the other). A good way to accomplish this is to place a pillow or two under your chest/stomach. This will also help you breathe if you are performing these exercises in bed!

Technique: Focus on squeezing your shoulder blades together by using the muscles between your shoulder blades. You should not feel like your shoulders are working. The upper trapezius muscles should stay relaxed, for if they are not, you will feel your shoulders rising towards your ears. When performing this exercise, think: “squeeze your shoulder blades together and put them into your back pockets.”.

Repetitions: 30 repetitions in the morning and at night. You need to feel the “burn” between your shoulder blades. These are endurance muscles and need their tolerance to be built up.

Practical Application: Perform this exercise while lying on your stomach so you are not fighting gravity. This is a key movement that can be performed while sitting, standing, or hanging upside down to maintain good posture throughout the day.

EXERCISE: STANDING/SEATED ROW



I recommend that you master the Stomach/shoulder blade squeezes prior to starting this exercise so that you can be successful with this one. You can use an exercise band or a cable weight machine.

POSITION: Lie on your stomach in a position that allows your head to be in a neutral position (versus being turned to one side or the other). A good way to accomplish this is to place a pillow or two under your chest/stomach. This will also help you breathe if you are performing these exercises in bed!

Repetitions: Three sets of 30. Remember these are endurance muscles and multiple repetitions performed correctly is the key.

Practical Application: Practical Application. As stated earlier, these are an advancement of the stomach shoulder blade squeezes and the resistance added will increase the muscle's ability to keep you in a correct postural position for longer periods of time.



THE AUTHOR



Ryan Schulz, PT DPT is a headache/migraine specialist who has received cutting edge training to reduce the symptoms and medication use of those who are headache/migraine sufferers. He resides in the state of Oregon where he enjoys the weather and outdoors. He is the husband to a wonderful woman who is an amazing mother to their two daughters.

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