

Balancing Act!

Helping Upper Back and Shoulder Pain

Does your upper back ever feel tight, as though you have “knots” in it? You may have an upper-trapezius strain, a common repetitive stress injury.

The trapezius is a large triangular muscle extending over the back of the neck and shoulders and moving the head and shoulder blade. Upper-trapezius pain can be triggered by consistently overusing the muscle group, even at a low intensity. Because repetitive motions do not allow the affected tissue to rest between movements, they can cause stress and irritation. Performing simple, everyday movements—such as habitually holding a telephone between the ear and shoulder—can trigger upper trapezius pains

The following exercises can help:

Sitting with upright posture, perform 15–20 reps of the following exercises every hour.

- 1. Scapular Pinches.** Roll the shoulders back, and pinch the shoulder blades together.
- 2. Shoulder Shrugs.** Raise the shoulders up toward the ears, then lower them back down.
- 3. Neck Side-Bending.** Tilt one ear toward the shoulder, and hold briefly. Repeat on the opposite side.
- 4. Neck Rotation.** Look over one shoulder, and pause briefly. Repeat on the opposite side.

If you feel tight or sore in the upper trapezius after the above movement-oriented exercises, perform 1–3 reps of the following static stretch, holding each rep for 30 seconds.

Neck Side-Bending/Rotation Stretch.

In a standing or seated position, place the right hand on top of the head and let the left arm rest at the side. Gently pull the head toward the right shoulder with the right hand.

Rotate the head down and look at the right hip. (The stretch should be felt on the left side of the neck/shoulder area.)

Repeat on the opposite side.

If your shoulders tend to round forward, you can improve this condition by the scapular pinch and by a pectorals stretch.

