



Cranbury Therapeutic Massage
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Massage & Yoga Therapy for Effective Neck Pain Relief

by Nancy Sheehan

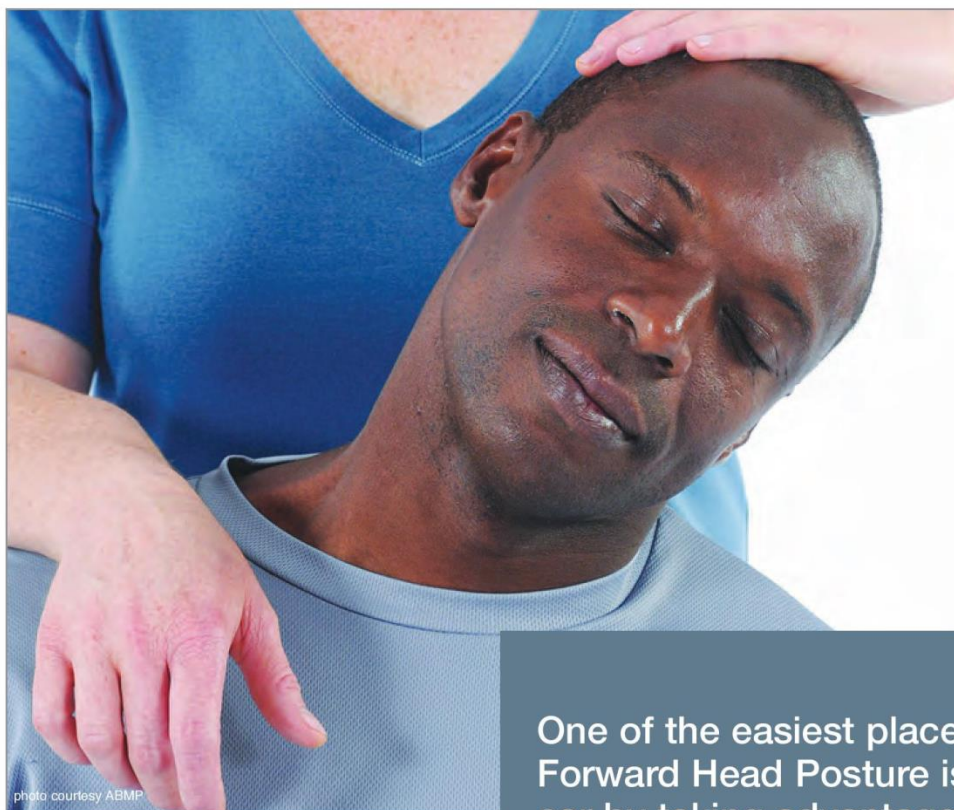


photo courtesy ABMP

One of the easiest places to correct Forward Head Posture is in the car by taking advantage of the head rest.

For many, chronic neck pain is a serious, painful, and frequently debilitating problem. Emotionally stressful states such as worry, grief, anger, or fear can cause us to clench our neck muscles without realizing it. Chemical stressors such as inhaling or ingesting toxins like tobacco, smog, unhealthy foods, preservatives, or even medications can affect muscle tone and the nerves of the neck. We find conventional treatments are of limited help, with medication only masking the symptoms and provid-

ing temporary relief. Unabated neck pain often contributes to pain in other areas such as the head, shoulder, arm, wrist, and hand. From a holistic perspective we must consider ideal alignment and how to restore it. By addressing the postural imbalances that cause neck pain through bodywork and yoga, it is possible to find relief.

So what does the ideal "perfect posture" look like? From the side you should be able to draw a line perpendicular to the floor straight through the ear, shoulder, hip, and ankle. Indicative of misalignment, any deviance from symmetry represents either a current or eventual problem. Unfortunately, Forward Head Posture (FHP) is a very common misalignment, and one of the main causes of chronic neck pain. A typical head weighs about 10-12 pounds and many of us spend much of the day in FHP either at the desk, doing dishes or driving the car. One of the easiest places to correct FHP is in the car while driving. By taking advantage of the head rest by leaning back on it, we can easily hold our head in balance over our shoulders. I always get laughs in lectures when I explain that we are driving as if our head has to get to our destination first!

Once a postural deviation from normal is identified, the next step is to identify the muscles involved. With FHP we see the muscles on the front of the body (anterior) chronically shorten and pull the neck out of alignment. Conversely the muscles on the back of the body (posterior) are abnormally stretched and irritated. A comprehensive approach that includes precise bodywork can address both of these issues. When we relieve the anterior neck muscles then the back and adjacent structures do not have to compen-

sate for the front muscles that are extremely tight and short. Attention to FHP, the root of the neck pain, will bring a more permanent relief. Most people with FHP complain of pain in the back of the neck but an effective treatment plan won't just chase the symptoms, it will accurately address the root cause and restore normal muscle tone. Therapeutic and individualized massage or yoga sessions will help bring the body's posture back to the plumb line and rebalance the head more precisely over the center. Good posture can even help with recovery from trauma such as sprained cervical (neck) ligaments from a whiplash, for example. Sometimes a lifestyle or ergonomic adjustment, such as changing from a purse to a backpack, or sitting in a chair of proper height, may be necessary. In general being conscious of maintaining proper posture as well as finding a way to release stress will help most people recover from their symptoms of FHP.

To find a qualified practitioner in your area to help with neck pain visit ABMP.com (for bodywork) or IAYT.com (for therapeutic yoga).

It is important to note that correcting FHP is a 24-hour-a-day task. In many cases of FHP, sleeping habits are partially to blame for creating the postural imbalance. Going to sleep in a fetal position, on your side with your head forward, re-enforces the FHP and all postural/physical stresses associated with it. Make it a habit to fall asleep lying on your back after consciously relaxing all of your muscles. Allow your limbs, torso and head to feel heavy as you imagine sinking into your bed. Falling asleep this way contributes to more restful sleep and can help you wake up feeling energized.

When our body is in balance it's much easier to relax and it is said that a more spacious neck allows a more open mental outlook. Let's all lift up our heads and enjoy the bounty of Mother Earth this season. 🌿.

Nancy Sheehan LMT is owner/director of Cranbury Therapeutic Massage. She believes that good neck posture often leads to joyful singing. For information visit cranburymassage.com.

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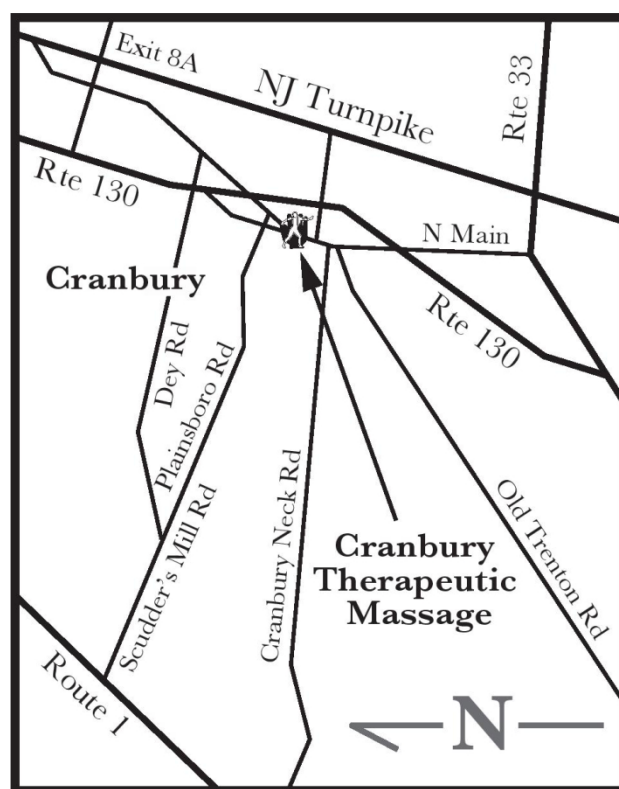
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