

ALLEVIATE YOUR COMPUTER POSTURE DISCOMFORT

During the course of a massage, I've often found muscles between the scapula and thoracic spine to be hard and tight. It also feels tight to the client, who immediately pleads with me to work right there – that's where they want me to provide them with relief. Unfortunately, it's out of my hands, literally! Why? These muscles are typically under *tensile stress*: stretched tight (like a rubber band). They're weak, and losing the battle against gravity. We teach this concept in the Onsen Techniques® series: muscles that are overstretched often feel tight to the client *and feel tight to the practitioner*. Massage might seem like a good idea, but relief is usually temporary. Often, a more permanent solution is to strengthen these muscles.

Onsen Therapy™ typically uses a series of isometric contractions to loosen and lengthen muscles, but the beauty of an isometric contraction is that it can also serve to strengthen a muscle. Below are several isometric exercises (some strengthen and some relax) that can banish your discomfort and improve your posture for these specific areas:

Neck (Forward Head Posture)

Upper Trapezius

Middle Trapezius (Forward Shoulder Posture)

Descending Trapezius (Shoulders curled Forward/Down)

Thoracic Erectors (Excessive Kyphotic Curve in Thoracic Spine)

A great witticism I've grown fond of is this: "Nobody likes to drink out of a fire hose." This what's so great about these exercises: each one can be done using your body's weight, just ONE time, for as long as you can hold it (to fatigue).

Neck Isometric (neck tension)

Perform a forward bend. Lace your fingers together and extend arms over your back/head as far as possible. ***Without changing your position***, lift your head up in opposition. Pit these two actions against each other for 20 seconds; return to standing (slowly).

Shoulder Shrug (upper trapezius)

Standing, lift shoulders as high as you can, contracting your muscles so hard that they're trembling. Continue for 20 seconds, then lower ***slowly***.

Modified Superman (descending fibers of trapezius)

Lying prone (resting forehead on floor), extend arms out in front of you. Upper arms are at roughly 45 degrees; forearms are pointing straight forward. Lift arms off floor; hold to fatigue.

Iron Cross (middle fibers of trapezius)

Lying prone (resting forehead on floor), stretch arms out to the side, perpendicular to your body (like the gymnastic feat on the rings). Make a fist, turn your thumbs up toward the ceiling and lift your arms off the floor, squeezing your shoulder blades together. Make sure your arms stay perpendicular to your body; hold to fatigue.

Swan Dive (thoracic erectors and more!)

Lying prone with arms down at sides, lift head, neck & chest off floor; squeeze shoulders together while externally rotating arms by sticking thumbs out like a hitch-hiker; hold to fatigue. This one relaxes the cervical & lumbar erectors while strengthening the thoracic erectors!

Restorative Yoga (this is your big reward!)

Using a bolster, yoga block or rolled up towel, position is horizontally, directly inferior to the bottom edge of your shoulder blades. (If neck's uncomfortable, place folded towel under your head.) Resting in this position for up to 5 minutes lets the force of gravity reverse the effects it has on our spines when we are upright (it bends us backward).

Onsen Techniques[®] teach us about the actions of muscles and their influence on the skeleton.

Introducing tensile stress as one cause of the tension we feel, Onsen[™] provides us with a new tool for relief: isometric contraction. In providing new information, Onsen[™] can also promote innovation, as was the case with me cooking up these exercises!