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"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"

Holiday Shopping- A Pain in the Neck or Back?

Can you believe that Christmas is only a matter of weeks away? Unfortunately, it is also a hectic time. Thus, as the biggest shopping days of the year approach, I urge you to treat holiday shopping as an athletic event. By preparing for it physically, as well as mentally, you will ward off the stress and strain that often accompanies this otherwise joyous season.

Before you race out at 6 am to that great department store sale, we offer the following checklist to help you avoid back, neck and other musculoskeletal pain:

1. Firstly, leave your impatient spouse at home. Just kidding. Actually, no I'm not kidding.
2. Drink water frequently throughout the day to keep your muscles and body hydrated.
3. Stretch before and after a long day of shopping. When you are under physical (prolonged standing and walking) and emotional stress, your muscles tighten and are less flexible than usual.
4. Wear shoes with plenty of cushioning in the soles to absorb the impact of walking on hard shopping mall floors.
5. Make sure the clothing you wear is as comfortable as possible. You may be going from a cold environment (outdoors) to a warm environment (indoors), so wear layers.
6. Leave your purse at home. Wear a light fanny pack or a light backpack instead. Pack only those items that are absolutely essential (driver's license, credit card, etc.).
7. Plan frequent breaks into your shopping day – at least once every 45 minutes for most people. Those with less stamina may need to take a break every 20-30 minutes.
8. When taking breaks, eat light foods. A salad and some fruit is a better option than a burger and fries.

9. Skip the prolonged or repetitive coffee break. Coffee contains caffeine, which dehydrates you and adds even more stress to your body.

10. If possible, take your packages to your car during your breaks. Don't carry around more than is absolutely necessary at one time, as it is hard on your neck and shoulders.

11. Once you're home, it is time to wrap your gifts. Since there is no "ideal" position for wrapping gifts, the most important thing to remember is to take breaks often. With each break, get up and walk around. Even a quick stretch would be good. Do not wrap packages while sitting on a hard floor. This can wreak havoc on your posture. Always stretch before and after you wrap gifts. Stretch the opposites; if you are leaning forward when wrapping your gifts, stretch backward when you are done.

12. Chiropractic care can help. If you experience pain or discomfort as a result of holiday shopping, apply an ice pack to the affected area for 20 minutes, then take it off for a couple of hours. Repeat a couple of times each day over the next day or two. In addition, plan a visit to a chiropractor. He or she can help restore the proper functioning of your muscles, joints, and nerves.