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

Holidays Can Be a Pain in the Neck

The season for hitting the highway to visit friends and relatives or to that tropical destination has arrived. This will involve long sessions of sitting in the car, plane, or even on the couch if you are lucky. In addition, you will likely be sleeping in a different bed with a different pillow at a hotel or a friend's place. All these changes in your lifestyle can often cause a pain or stiffness in the neck.

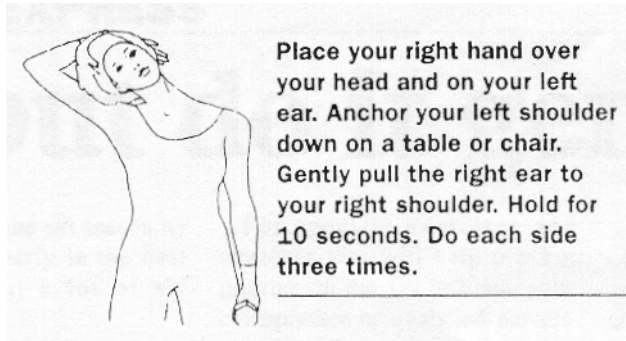
People do not often think about it but your neck becomes very accustomed to a certain level of activity and a specific position while sleeping. When this pattern is changed dramatically, problems arise. It may start as just stiffness in the neck when you wake up in the morning, which often loosens up as your day goes on. Then, you turn your head to do a shoulder check while driving or some type of activity that you should normally be able to do. Suddenly, your neck is in spasm with sharp pain and you are nowhere near your chiropractor or other health care practitioner. The holiday cheer quickly just doesn't seem as fun any more.

There are steps you can take to prevent this from putting a damper on the holidays:

- 1) Stretching your neck regularly before and during the holidays will help. Examples of these stretches are on my website: www.merrittchiro.com
- 2) If possible, take the pillow that your neck is accustomed to using with you to your destination. Pillows vary substantially and if you are accustomed to one particular size or shape and dramatically changing it could cause problems with the neck.
- 3) When driving long distances, stop regularly and stretch your neck and back. This is a good time to do the stretches I mentioned. If you are flying, walk up and down the aisle each hour or so.
- 4) When unloading luggage, do not try to carry it all at once. Lifting heavy after you have been sitting for hours in a car is just asking for neck and back pain. This is especially true if the luggage is in the trunk or back seat.
- 5) Wear your seatbelt. You may be able to control your own quality of driving but it is most often the other drivers that will cause an accident.
- 6) Raise the headrest of the seat and do not recline it backwards too far. There should be no more than two inches between the headrest and the back of your head. The top of headrest should be slightly higher than the top of your head. Many of the estimated

twenty million car accident victims could have lessened their whiplash injuries if their headrests were properly adjusted.

Most importantly, remember that holidays are for relaxing. Don't get stressed out during the travel portion of the holidays. It will only make your neck stiff and tight. If you would like further stretches and exercises for your neck and back, contact your



chiropractor. Happy holidays!

