

Texting is bad 4 UR spine, suggests study



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A new study finds that use of the cell phone and tablet, with the neck in a bent position, may cause degenerative changes in the spine. Take frequent breaks and pay attention to the angle of your head

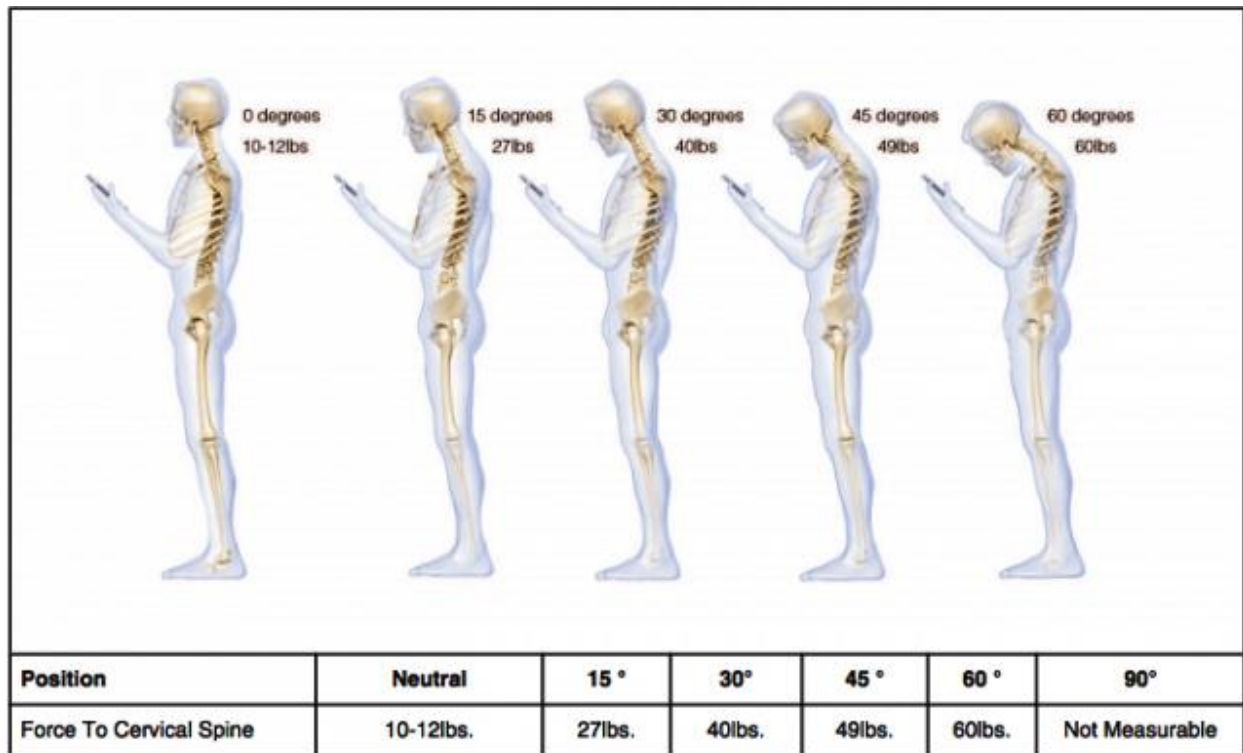


Figure 1. The weight seen by the spine increases when flexing the neck at varying degrees. An adult head weighs 10-12 pounds in the neutral position. As the head tilts forward the forces seen by the neck surges to 27 pounds at 15 degrees, 40 pounds at 30 degrees, 49 pounds at 45 degrees and 60 pounds at 60 degrees.

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- The study, performed by spine surgeon Dr. Kenneth Hansraj, tied cell phone use to neck strain
- Looking down at cell phones and tablets may eventually lead to degenerative changes in the spine
- Try to take breaks from texting, says Dr. Ezriel Kornel, and be aware of your body position
- The Alexander technique can help you learn ways to position your body and avoid strain

You may want to take a break from staring down at your cell phone or tablet: A new study finds that all that digital socializing may be setting you up for trouble with your spine.

The study, led by orthopedic surgeon Dr. Kenneth K. Hansraj, a spine specialist, looked at the stress put on the neck by the weight of the head when it's in texting position. An ordinary adult head weighs 10 to 12 pounds, but when it's bent at a 60-degree angle, the forces endured by the neck surge to 60 pounds, says the study.

And the cumulative effect of years of that stress can lead to degeneration of the spine itself.

The study, "Assessment of Stresses in the Cervical Spine Caused by Posture and Position of the Head," appears in the journal *Surgical Technology International*.

Dr. Ezriel Kornel, a neurosurgeon with Brain & Spine Surgeons of New York, in White Plains, says that while research has been done on the position of the body in relation to a computer screen or keyboard, this is probably the first study to look at the impact of the smart phone and tablet on the cervical spine. The damage incurred by the head bent over a small screen may not be evident immediately, he says, but over time it can definitely take its toll.

"If you're not going to text less, you have to be aware of the way you position yourself vis-à-vis your smart phone," he says. "Awareness is the number-one thing."

Ideally, you'd want to keep the phone or tablet at a higher level, so you're not bending your head down every time you look at the screen, he says.

Kornel also suggests the following:

- Recognize that neck problems can be a real issue with smart phone or tablet use, and learn appropriate body mechanics so you're not putting long-term strain on your neck. The Alexander technique is worth exploring, he says, as it's a form of training that makes you aware of optimal body positioning.
- If you're suffering from neck pain or headaches, consider how often you use your cell phone and tablet — and change the way you're using them, if possible.
- Give yourself a break. "Maybe there should be an app that reminds people when they've been looking at their device for more than 15 minutes to take a break, stretch their necks, reposition and adjust," he says.

"That's an easy thing to do."

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