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SMARTPHONES and Your Posture

The headline above comes from a December 5, 2011 article in The Economic Times, an online news publication covering the UK and India. The article starts off by noting that more Britains are using their smart phones for accessing the Internet and other tasks. A recent British poll from YouGov noted that, 44% of Britons use their mobile phone for activities other than making calls, for between 30 minutes and two hours per day.

Dr. Tim Hutchful from the British Chiropractic Association reports that leaning the head forward for extended periods of time to read the smaller screens has an adverse effect on the neck. The weight of an average human head is between 10 to 12 pounds (4.5 to 5.5 kilogrammes). He notes that if you look at a person with an ideal posture, you should be able to draw a line from their ear through their shoulder, hip, knee and ankle.

The article notes that when a person uses a smart phone, typically the head is leaned forward causing the effective weight of the head on the neck to be up to four times as much than if the head were held in straight-up neutral position.

Both Dr. Hutchful, and Dr. Emmanuelle Rivoal, a Paris-based physiotherapist and osteopath, report seeing more problems from the use of these devices. One of the more common terms being tossed around today is "Text Neck" which Dr. Hutchful described as a manifestation of repetitive strain injury or RSI. The article defines RSI by stating, "RSI is the name given to a group of injuries affecting the muscles, tendons and nerves primarily of the neck and upper limbs."

Dr. Rivoal added that these types of problems were common with people who work on computers, "because they spend more than five hours a day in front of a screen." He noted that a hand held device can be even worse because the screen is smaller.

Dr. Hutchful offered some advice to avoid injury for those who use smartphones regularly. This includes things as simple as keeping smartphone use at under 40 minutes. He offers, "Keep use to a minimum, take regular breaks and look at different ways of interacting."