

## Fixing Neck Pain & Headaches

If you have neck pain and headaches, it is probably affecting everything you do. If you're like most people, you've probably had a ton of X-rays, MRI's, and CT scans and seen doctors, therapists, chiropractors, acupuncturists, massage therapists, or others with little to no help. Damage to this region can take on the form of carpal tunnel syndrome, thoracic outlet syndrome, or other difficult diagnoses. Why is this such a mystery? Why do you still have pain in spite of being to the best health care practitioners out there?

Because most therapies for chronic neck pain, headaches, or other issues target only the cervical spine. They don't take into consideration a primary stressor to the neck--the shoulder girdle.

What? Your *shoulders* may be causing your neck pain and headaches? How?!

The shoulder girdle is unique in the body because it is a floating system held in place by muscular control, not by joint compression.

With respect to neck pain, two of these muscles connect directly from the shoulder blade to the cervical spine as well as base of the skull (Figure 1). When muscles controlling the shoulders are not functioning properly, stress is delivered to the neck along these attachments. Consequently neck pain ensues due to excessive compression, sidebending, or rotation of the vertebrae. Because one of these muscles also connects to the base of the skull, the head will also not rest or move correctly, affecting the muscles traveling from the cervical spine to the skull.

When the shoulder girdle is not functioning correctly, vulnerabilities are established within the cervical spine as a result of the cumulative stress delivered by the shoulder girdle.

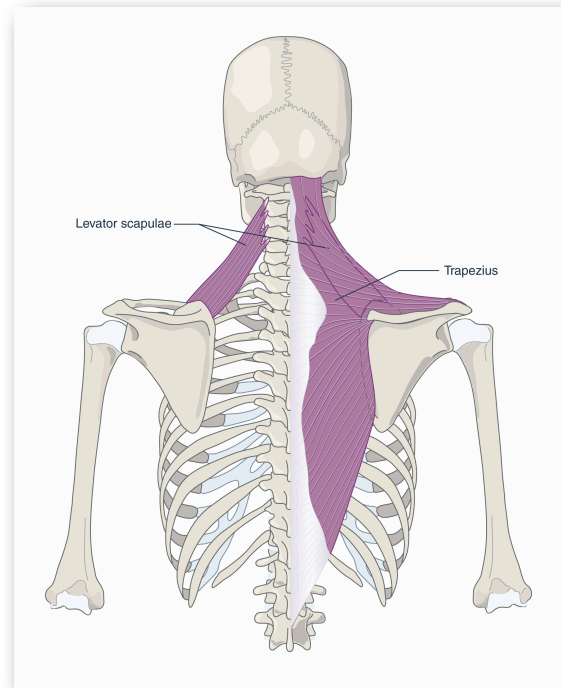


Figure 1

### The Shape of Your Spine

A second major stressor to the neck is the shape of your spine. Most people have a normal curve to their upper thoracic spine. However there is a lot of variability to this.

Some people have rounder thoracic spines and some have flatter. Both extremes affect the curvature of the cervical spine. When the curve of the spine is affected, it changes how we move the neck for instance when we turn to look over our shoulder or look down to our chest. This causes irritation to tissues within the neck creating pain and headaches as well.

These problems (shoulder and thoracic spine) are created over many years. Because we have so many muscles supporting each other, often these problems go unnoticed until an event such as an auto accidents or fall exposes these inherent weaknesses. This is why traditional treatments don't work, especially after accidents--because they are only looking in the immediate vicinity of the pain and not the systemic problems that are in place that have created them.

## **Neck Pain Test**

Here's a little test you can do. If you have neck pain or headaches right now while sitting in your chair, get a bunch of pillows and stack them on your lap up to your shoulders. Now rest your arms on top of the pillows. Get the whole arm on top of them, so the pillows are almost in your armpits. Also make sure you are resting comfortably against the back of the chair. Put a pillow between you and the chair if necessary. Rest there for about 1 minute. Move your head around a little if you like. Do you have less pain after the minute? If you're not sure, take all the pillows away and let your arms rest down by your sides the way they usually do. Now move your head around if you like. Which feels more comfortable? Most people will say the pillows helped them quite a bit. Why? Because the pillows held up the weight of your arms instead of your neck holding them up (remember those muscular attachments I mentioned earlier?). The pillows have essentially done the work your shoulder girdle positioning muscles should've been doing. This hopefully gives you a glimpse into the causes of your neck pain or headaches.

My book, *Fixing You: Neck Pain & Headaches*, highlights this issue and teaches you how to fix it ([www.FixingYou.net](http://www.FixingYou.net)).

**You can also reach me at (303) 477-4212 or email [Rick@RickOlderman.com](mailto:Rick@RickOlderman.com) if you'd like to set up an appointment or ask a question.**