

Good Posture can Prevent 'Pain in the Neck.'

LAWRENCEVILLE - There is a nation-wide emphasis on cervical health during the month of January, but many of those problems could be limited, if not avoided altogether, by simply practicing better posture, according to a local expert.

Lila Manzo, Director of Rehabilitation at Lawrence County Memorial Hospital, sees a handful of patients who are experiencing neck or back pain on a weekly basis. Poor posture, she says, is the biggest reason.

“A lot of us, unfortunately, have our shoulders sort of rounded, and sit hunched at our computers or in reclining chairs,” said Manzo, who has worked at LCMH for about four years. “That makes us kind of bend into a ‘C’ shape. That’s not particularly good for your spine and it’s not good for your neck.”

Manzo says it’s best to sit or stand at attention, “like a soldier would.”

“Put your bottom all the way to the back of the chair, with your shoulders back and your chin tucked up,” she said. “It’s good to try to stand that way, too.”

It’s not practical for someone to practice good posture “100 percent of the time,” Manzo says. However, focusing on that for just a few minutes a day “can make a big difference in your overall health.”

She suggests asking a spouse or other family member to keep an eye on your posture, and issue a gentle reminder should you get off kilter.

Symptoms of cervical problems can include:

- Dizziness
- Fever
- Burning pain
- Headaches
- Night sweats
- Blurred vision
- Tiredness
- Facial pain

Because neck muscles are “the hardest-working muscles in the body,” problems can arise, Manzo says.

“Any time you’re awake, those muscles are in use,” she said. “Even if you’re sitting comfortably, watching television or reading a book, your muscles are still on the job. They don’t relax until your head hits the pillow.”

Generally, the neck and back pain develop over time. Therefore, a lot of patients who visit the physical therapy department at the hospital are getting on in years.

“Usually when we see people is after they’ve sat like that for years,” said Manzo, a 1987 graduate of Washington University in St. Louis with a degree in Physical Therapy. “Now that they’re in pain, we have their attention.”

Treatment can vary, depending upon the symptoms. The physical therapy staff will analyze the situation, then develop a plan.

“We want to start by addressing the pain,” Manzo said. “That’s the reason people walk in the door. “

Manzo says a number of “modalities” are available as part of treatment. They include exercises as well as heat, ice and electrical devices. Patients may also be sent home with things such as braces, special pillows or traction units to help expedite recovery.

“But we also use a lot of massage techniques, especially for cervical pain,” she said.

The physical therapy department at the hospital is open from 7 a.m. until 3 p.m., Monday through Friday. However, special arrangements can be made to see patients either before or after regular hours. The physical therapy department can be reached by dialing 943-1000, ext. 7225.

The best medicine, though, is prevention.

“It’s hard to persuade people to improve their posture until it really hurts,” Manzo said. “By then, they’re ready to come see us. We’ll be here to help.”