

November 2007

Tight Hips and Shrinking Muscles: Sitting in a Heap of Trouble



We are a country of workaholic couch potatoes. No matter how good our intentions, the sad fact is that many of us work 9-to-5 office jobs, sitting in a chair (and often sitting with terrible posture), hunched over a computer for the majority of the day. In addition to those myriad problems related to this type of sedentary lifestyle, now we can add tight hip flexors to the list.

The hip flexors are the muscles in the front of your hip that pull your thigh upward, or “flex” your hip. **When you sit for long periods of time, these muscles become contracted or shortened—and the longer they stay in this position, the more they want to stay there.** Thus, your hip flexors become stubborn about returning to their correct length, resulting in a chronic case of hyperactive, shortened muscles.

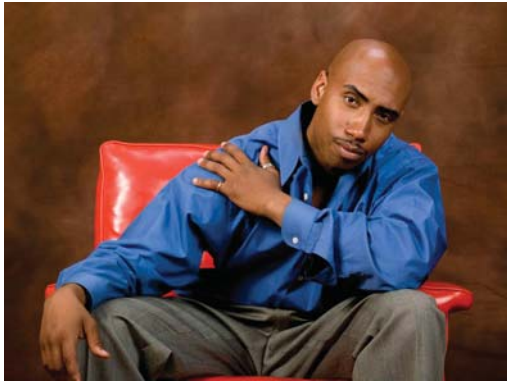
Muscles work in pairs. They function better when each one of the pair maintains a similar length and strength. When your hip flexors start getting shorter and working harder, the muscles opposite them become longer and less active. The longer this goes on, the worse the problems become—in other words, your tight hip flexors basically start “shutting down your opposing muscles.”

It is important to correct this muscle imbalance before it becomes what the body perceives as normal. The best way to combat tight hip flexors is through a physical therapy program that teaches you proper sitting posture, stretching exercises for your tight flexors and ways of strengthening the corresponding weakened, “shut-down” muscles.

There is not much most of us can do about the sedentary nature of our jobs. But with proper stretching, strengthening and awareness, we can at least prevent our hip flexors from creating additional problems for other muscle groups.

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Patience Can Thaw Frozen Shoulder Syndrome



Doctors estimate that 2% of the general population have a condition called adhesive capsulitis, also commonly referred to as frozen shoulder syndrome (FSS). Characterized during the onset of symptoms by night pain and reduced range of motion, usually in just one shoulder, FSS most often strikes people 40–60 years of age, with women being affected more often than men. Those with diabetes are also 10–29% more likely to develop FSS due to changes in tissues

resulting from high glucose levels.

While the causes of FSS remain unknown, doctors believe that recent injury, either major or minor, can trigger FSS. Other suggested triggers range from chronic diseases, like arthritis and diabetes, to thyroid problems, immobilization and Parkinson's disease. However, for most patients, the cause cannot be determined.

There are three stages of FSS:

Stage 1: The “freezing” stage lasts up to nine months and involves pain at night developing into more chronic pain and a diminishing range of motion.

Stage 2: The “frozen” stage lasts between four and 12 months; pain is reduced but range of motion remains limited.

Stage 3: During the “thawing” stage pain is minimal, and there is a marked improvement in range of motion lasting between five and 26 months.

Consistent effective treatment for FSS, like the cause of the condition, remains elusive and controversial. Since inflammation of the joint is believed to be involved in the early stages, many physicians recommend nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen or naproxen. In extreme cases, your physician may recommend corticosteroid injections or surgery.

However, **the most effective course of treatment seems to be a combination of physical therapy and NSAIDs** during the “thawing” stage to regain strength and mobility. But even with these treatment options, **patience may be the key** to dealing with FSS. Contact us for help in your recovery from this frustrating condition.

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Walk Your Way to Fitness



Starting an exercise program can seem like a daunting task, but it is really as simple as getting off the couch and walking out your front door. Walking is one of the easiest and most beneficial forms of exercise. It burns calories, is easy on your joints, strengthens your bones and muscles, reduces stress and reduces your risk of chronic conditions such as heart disease and diabetes. Best of all, walking requires no expensive, special equipment, can be done anywhere and it's free!

You can begin your program by walking for 20 minutes every day (10 minutes in one direction and 10 minutes back) for one week. Each week add five minutes to your total walking time. Keep increasing the amount of time you walk daily until you are at your walking goal. Below are seven tips to help get you started. Talk to us today about designing a walking program to improve your overall health.

- 1. Start slow and easy.** Don't try to burn up the miles your first week out.
- 2. Take time to stretch.** Walk a few minutes first and then stretch; this helps prevent injuries.
- 3. Practice good walking posture.** Keep elbows close to your body. Each arm should move forward and backward with the opposite foot. Also, keep your chin up. This helps align your posture for maximum benefit.
- 4. Drink plenty of water** before, during and after your walk.
- 5. Invest in proper footwear.** Comfortable walking shoes with a flexible sole and plenty of toe room are a good choice. Some shoes are even designed to help with any walking issues you may have, like overpronation. Also, choose socks made of materials that will help keep your feet dry to prevent blisters.
- 6. Dress appropriately.** Don't forget a hat, sunglasses and sunscreen when you need them during the day. At night, wear clothing with reflective materials so you are visible to others.
- 7.** While not a necessity, **a personal stereo can be a great energizer** by keeping you moving to the music—but be careful not to get too lost in the music and become endangered by the traffic.

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How Your Mattress Affects Back and Neck Pain



People who suffer from back and neck pain, particularly when it's chronic, look to many sources hoping to relieve their discomfort. One frequently asked question is whether the purchase of a special mattress will help to manage back and neck pain. Since a large amount of a person's time is spent sleeping, a poor mattress can have a major impact on your back and neck—causing pain or exacerbating existing problems.

Many people find mattresses with adjustable pressure to be very comfortable. These mattresses, although expensive, tend to alleviate neck and back pain, providing more restful sleep. If you do choose to purchase a special mattress, it's important to keep the following points in mind:

- **Try out the mattress prior to purchasing;**
- **Consider one that has a 30-day or longer “test” period; and**
- **Try different sleep positions to ensure that all are comfortable.**

While purchasing a high-quality, special mattress can help support back and neck health, we can also work with you to develop an exercise plan that helps to reduce pain in these areas. Some helpful ways to address back and neck pain include:

- **Strengthening exercises;**
- **Gentle stretching; and**
- **Low-impact aerobic conditioning.**

Daily stretching can help relieve stiffness and discomfort in the back and neck areas. It's recommended to first warm up the muscles with a brief walk or similar form of activity before stretching. Although stretching can be done daily, try to schedule your exercises so that strengthening and aerobic exercises are done on alternate days.

We can work with you to construct a regimen that relieves back and neck pain and improves function primarily through exercise. A special, supportive mattress is a perfect complement to sustain your maintenance plan for a more pain-free lifestyle.

November 2007

Elliptical Trainers: Before You Buy, Give Them a Try



If you are in the market for an elliptical trainer, you have probably already heard about some of the benefits. Elliptical trainers have been receiving positive press recently as a popular, low-impact workout for both your upper and lower body. Often helpful to patients undergoing rehabilitation or for those with joint problems, elliptical trainers also provide another benefit: workout-for-workout against a treadmill,

elliptical trainers allow you to burn the same number of calories as jogging but are much easier on your joints.

Whenever buying a piece of exercise equipment for the home, try it out first, and not just once but several times. Remember, if you are going to make an investment in your fitness future, make sure you will get the workout you want without becoming bored with the routine.

Visit us to learn more about using an elliptical trainer. We will guide you through the equipment's features while teaching you the proper posture and position to achieve maximum benefits while using the machine.

Before purchasing an elliptical trainer, familiarize yourself with different models by speaking to a knowledgeable salesperson at a sporting goods or fitness store. Pay particular attention to features such as adjustable incline and resistance, stride length, heart rate monitor and service warranty. Once you have a model in mind, read consumer reviews on the Internet to see what others have to say about your choice.

Finally, make sure your elliptical trainer will fit in the space you have at home. After all, you don't want to be bumping into walls or ceilings.

We can help you take these steps to a better body and healthier lifestyle. The more homework you do before you buy, the better your elliptical trainer will work for you.