

# Text neck can lead to spinal damage

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COMMENT

INTERNET connections via smart-phones in South Africa increased from 23 million in 2014 to 28 million in 2015 and are expected to grow to 34 million by next year, according to PricewaterhouseCoopers's recently released Entertainment and Media Outlook 2015-2019 report.

With increased usage of smart-phones, South Africans are increasingly placing themselves at risk of poor posture, degeneration and early wear and tear on the spine.

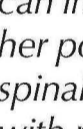
Text neck, which is the result of being exposed to extended periods of abnormal and positional stress, caused by looking down at electronic devices, can be detrimental to health as it changes and misaligns the cervical spine.

Text neck is linked to repetitive strain injuries to the neck and upper back.

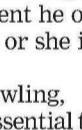
As much as technology is an essential part of modern life, so too is it important that people fully understand the consequences of its over-use, especially by children.

When looking down at a phone, the head is tilted 15°. The weight of the head can triple and the increase in force can cause neck pain, shoulder tension, headaches, fatigue and eventually accelerate the degeneration of spinal joints and discs. Over time the soft tissues may also adapt to this incorrect position, causing a stooped-over posture.

Consider the difference in brain development when a child is playing in the sand or with a box or ball,



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compared to pushing buttons on a screen.

A child's brain develops with the physical engagement he or she has with the object he or she is playing with.

Therefore crawling, climbing and running are essential to healthy brain development and should be encouraged all the time."

If a child stares at a screen, he or she is completely passive.

An immature brain and nervous system is not designed to cope with the excessive sensory stimulation received from electronic devices.

Added to this the movement and alignment of the spine has the most effect on brain development, which is why spinal alignment and posture is a critical part of health.

Spinal joints which don't move correctly begin to degenerate and spinal damage can develop slowly over time without any apparent symptoms.

It is never too late to improve spinal health.

With the help of an expert, almost anybody can improve his or her posture and spinal alignment with regular check-ups. The earlier issues are picked up, the easier they are to correct.

Therefore, regular checks – just as you would check teeth – are the best way to prevent and detect damage, naturally correct abnormal alignment and restore healthy spinal movement.

When SMSing, be aware of the following:

- Be mindful about the time spent looking down at a cellphone or tablet.
- Lift the device closer to eye level and ensure the head is not tilted too far forward.
- Move as often as possible. Get up off your chair and move the spine through all its different ranges of motion. This will stimulate the nervous system and hydrate the joints and discs.
- Get your spine assessed by a chiropractor.

● **Dr Delgado is the principal chiropractor at Delgado Chiropractic and Wellness Expert in Cape Town, and has been practising in South Africa since 2010.**