

# How the Alexander Technique can help you avoid 'text neck'



Learning the Alexander Technique has been shown by randomised controlled clinical trials to have long-

term benefits for people with chronic back pain, as well as for those with chronic neck pain. While learning the Alexander Technique involves one-to-one lessons, there are many practical tips we can take away and explore by ourselves. Researcher and Alexander Technique teacher, **Julia Woodman** continues this series of articles with some practical advice on how to put less stress and strain on our spines as we go about our daily lives.

**H**ave you ever noticed what happens to your head, neck and back when you pick up your mobile phone to text someone?

Next time, see if you can take a moment to be aware of how you're looking at the phone and how you're holding it. If you get the chance, have a sideways peek at yourself in a mirror. Then, when you're out and about, look around to

see how other people are using their mobiles. Whether they're on the bus or walking down the street, you'll probably see the same pattern.

So what are we doing to ourselves when we use a mobile like this? Well most of the bending is happening in the neck itself. Now that's interesting because that isn't where the major joint is, in other words that's not where

the head actually sits on top of the spine. It's almost as if we've come to subconsciously believe that the head and neck are one thing, when, of course, the neck is part of the spine along with the back. When we move "as nature intended", you'll see a different pattern, more like that in the next photo (you'll also notice that the young woman has made things easier by bringing the phone a bit closer to her head).

Now find your own head/neck joint. Gently place a couple of fingers behind each ear lobe and find those prominent bony bits. Imagine that you could draw a line through your head between these two bony parts. That's the level at which your head sits on top of your spine

–in other words, that's where your head ends and your neck begins.

It's much further up than we usually think and it's one of our most important joints. It's called the atlanto-occipital joint, which simply means where the top vertebra (the Atlas, after the Greek god who in mythology held up the world) meets the bottom of the skull (the occiput). But knowing its name is not important, whereas having a basic practical understanding and awareness of it is. You can see how the head sits poised on top of the spine in the image below.

Because we usually only see ourselves from the front, it's easy to subconsciously form the idea that our necks end at

about the same level as our chins but, as you can see, the top of the spine is much higher up.

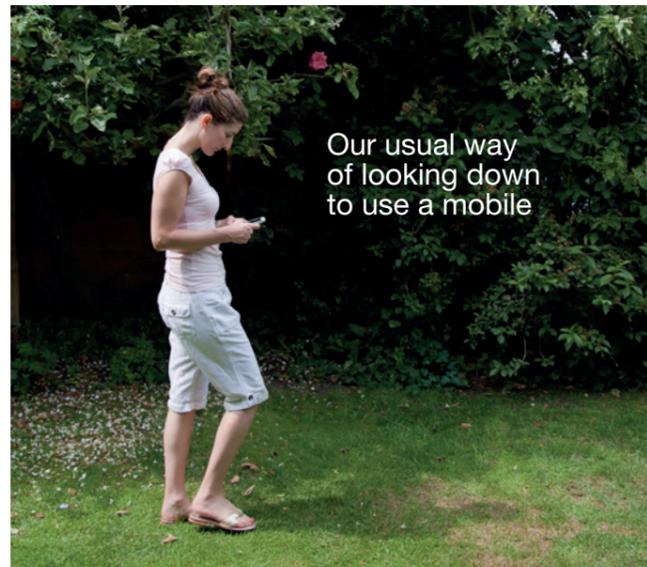
So, bearing in mind where your head really sits on top of your spine, think of it like the pivot point on a seesaw. The important word here is 'allow' – the head is heavy, it's the weight of a bowling ball (about 4.5kg), so you don't need to pull your head down, just allow the nose to gently drop with gravity. Then slowly and gently look upwards again (back to looking straight ahead) with the movement again centred on the pivot point. What do you notice? Is the movement easy?

## So why does this matter?

Our spines are amazingly strong and flexible, and we need that flexibility to be able to make all the complex movements that we do as we go about our daily lives. But, if we form the habit of always moving from within the spine rather than from the head/neck joint, then, in the long run we are more likely to end up with problems such as neck pain. And, of course, it's not just when we use our mobile phones that we tend to move in this way, it's every time we look down and that's quite a lot of times in the average day!

With the Alexander Technique we learn how we can carry out our daily activities with more freedom and less strain on our spine and joints. Changing the habits that we've had for most of our lives is not easy and this is where working with an Alexander teacher can be so helpful.

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The Alexander Technique is a taught self-care approach which offers people of any age or ability a way to improve their health and wellbeing. It can be applied in all situations in everyday life and can lead to better balance, co-ordination and freedom of movement

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