

Neck Pain

Structural Yoga Therapy Course

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1) Case Study

A - INITIAL INTAKE

Steven S is a 34 year old male standing at 5' 11". He is currently an actor. He attends auditions on an almost daily basis but does not have a current full time job. He is a long time runner who has run 2 marathons in the past and has no health issues other than the chronic pain in his neck. He has had this pain since college. The pain comes and goes but comes more often during times of stress. He describes the pain when, at its worst, it seems to be "pounding and deep" upwards of the neck deep beneath the occipital bone. Sometimes he hears a "cracking" sound when turning or rotating his neck. The pain usually begins between the shoulders. He has seen a doctor, who told him that it was caused by an alignment / posture issue and that he had a forward head. He sometimes gets massage to help relieve the pain but other than that he has sought no other treatment.

He is an early riser who usually exercises toward the end of the day. His eating habits are good in general but he sometimes eats late. His biggest meal is during lunch time. He eats mostly vegetables and a lot of dairy. He has been trying to meditate on his own on a daily basis and has looked into taking a class on meditation recently. In general he relaxes by watching television. He is stimulated by creativity and action. He is always seeking acting jobs that stimulate this aspect of his personality. He feels most connected when he spends time with good friends. He has never practiced yoga before.

Steven is predominantly Vata. He has a slender frame. He is very lively and animated in his speech. He is open, warm and friendly and very quickly opens up to discuss his life and his habits. When I explained to him how Yoga Therapy works and gave him lifestyle suggestions he seemed to absorb the information like a sponge and was writing down everything that I told him. His living environment is warm and open, neat and orderly.

We talked about possible causes of stress in his life and for now there are none since a big issue in his life came to a close with a happy result at the end of December. During this period of stress he was involved in a class action lawsuit against the restaurant that he worked for and had to continue working there under great duress until the lawsuit was over. The pain in his neck was at its worst during this time but has only come back sporadically since then.

B - Physical Assessment

My initial body reading analysis showed that left shoulder was much higher than the right and he did have a forward head but it did not seem too prominent. He told me that it was more prominent when he was walking. He demonstrated this for me and he was correct in this. It is possible this is a physical manifestation of a Vata imbalance since Vata always seems to be trying to "get ahead of itself" and needs to be constantly moving. There is some "ticking" movement that involves rolling the head across the right side every so often during conversation. His neck was very weak on all tests as were his shoulder extensors and scapula adductors.

Sacroiliac test was normal
There was no sign of scoliosis when tested

Leg length test was even

Range of Motion Assessments							
Joint Action	ROM	29 th April	29 th April	27 th May	27 th May	23 rd July	23 rd July
	Norm°	Left	Right	Left	Right	Left	Right
NECK	Norm°	Left	Right	Left	Right	Left	Right
Neck Extension (seated)	55°	35		35		45	
Neck Lateral Flexion (seated)	45°	40	42	40	45	42	45
Neck Rotation (seated)	70°	60	68	65	68	70	68
SHOULDER	Norm°	Left	Right	Left	Right	Left	Right
Abduction Horizontal (seated)	40°	40	30	40	35	40	45
Adduction Horizontal (seated)	130°	130	135	130	135	135	130
Extension (prone see above)	50°	60	55	60	55	55	55

Muscle Testing Assessments						
Joint Action	2 nd April	2 nd April	27 th May	27 th May	23 rd July	23 rd July
NECK	Left, 1-5	Right, 1-5	Left, 1-5	Right, 1-5	Left, 1-5	Right, 1-5
Neck Extension Ridge	2		3		3	
Mid taps/scapula adduction (prone)	3	3	3	4	4	4
Neck Flexion (supine)	2		2		3	
Neck Lateral Flexion (supine)	3	3	2	3	3	4
Neck Rotation (supine)	2	2	3	3	3	4
SHOULDER	Left, 1-5	Right, 1-5	Left, 1-5	Right, 1-5	Left, 1-5	Right, 1-5
Abduction prone	3	4	4	4	4	4
Adduction (supine)	3	3	3	4	4	4

Shoulder extensors (prone)	3	3	3	3	4	4
External Rotation (supine)	4	3	4	3	4	3
Internal Rotation (supine)	3	4	3	3	3	4
Flexion (supine)	4	4	3	4	3	4
Lat isolation test (supine)	4	4	4	4	4	4

C – Summary of findings

Strengthen	Stretch
Sternocleidomastoid	Upper Trapezius
Lower Trapezius	
Latissimus Dorsi	
Pectoralis Major	

D – Recommendations

First Session April 29th

Joint Freeing Series 13 – 21 ¹ upper body focusing awareness with breathe and movement particularly at the neck area. Starting with 3 repetitions and working up to 6. Savasana² followed by wave breathe³ for vata balancing and mediation. Wake early to exercise and mediate before breakfast to capture the pranic energy of the early morning hours. Maintain a healthy diet of organic, in season food. Eat grounding foods like cooked whole grains, beans and vegetables. Avoid uncooked foods, like salads, and sour foods. These foods can unbalance Vata. Have the biggest meal at noon, when the digestive system is functioning at its highest. Take a walk after each meal. In his book “ayurvedic Healing Cuisine”, Harish Johari recommends walking “at least 108 steps” after each meal.

¹ Joint Freeing Series from Structural yoga Therapy Book, Mukunda Stiles

² 24 Poses by Mukunda Stiles from Structural Yoga Therapy Book

³ From Structural yoga Therapy Book, Mukunda Stiles

Second Session May 6th

I had him lie in Savasana and do Pranayamas for pain⁴ substituting the word tension for pain, telling him to let go of everything that was unnecessary, keeping only what is beneficial.

⁴Pain relief technique by Mukunda Stiles from handout, October 13th 2007 Session

Fourth Session May 21st 2008

Do upper body JFS in conjunction with “The Concise Book of Muscles⁵ as a visual tool to promote further awareness

⁵ “The Concise Book of Muscles” by Chris Jarmey

Fifth Session May 27th 2008

Since the muscles at the sight of pain are particularly weak, focus should at first be on strengthening these. Using the following 3 asanas from Mukunda Stiles 24 poses:

Cobra- Strengthens erector spinae, lower and middle trapezius

Locust – Strengthens erector spinae

Bridge – Strengthens middle and lower trapezius

Sixth Session June 17th 2008

Neck strengthening exercise⁶, done dynamically and gently, stopping when trembling begins. Start with 3 repetitions and work up to 6 repetitions as strength builds.

⁶Page 180, Structural Yoga Therapy book, Mukunda Stiles

Seventh Session June 23rd 2008

Side neck strengthening exercise⁷ position done dynamically. 3 repetitions, work up to 6 repetitions as strength builds.

⁷ Demonstrated by Mukunda Stiles from NYC Session, May 17th 2008

Eighth Session July 17th 2008

Neck Strengthening using the following 3 asanas from Mukunda Stiles 24 poses:

Extended Triangle – Strengthens sternocleidomastoid

Spinal Twist – Strengthens sternocleidomastoid, latissimus

Camel Pose – Strengthens sternocleidomastoid, latissimus

Nadi Shodhana (alternate nostril breathing)⁸ for balancing vata

⁸ Ayurvedic Yoga Therapy Book, Mukunda Stiles

E – Results of your Recommendations

2nd Session – 6th May 2008

We went over the JFS. He had a few specific questions about movements and had been looking forward to our session for some “fine tuning”. He observes that what feels best about the JFS is integrating the breath with the movement. It helps him to stay focused and go within. This being his first experience with Yoga, his level of discernment is impressive. It shows his Pitta to be Strong. Steven says he was particularly stressed and the last week had been very stressful and he was holding on to lots of tension. I had him lie in Savasana and do Pranayamas for pain 3, substituting the word ‘tension’ for ‘pain’, telling him to let go of everything that was unnecessary, keeping only what is beneficial. After that he said he felt much better. He continued rolling his neck throughout the remainder of our session but not as intensely as I had noticed before and not as often. We talked about his practice. He has been doing the JFS every day, though at different times. He hasn’t noticed any change in his body but he did not get a migraine this week and he usually does when he is feeling a high level of stress

3rd Session -14th May 2008

Steven has been practicing the JFS daily. Usually he practices when he wakes up in the morning, but sometimes at night. He follows his practice with meditation. The past week was busy with auditions. He told me that he had a particularly difficult audition in which he had to sing a solo piece “on the spot” in front of a large group. This is something that would usually unnerve him but he was able to remain completely calm and at peace. He feels that his daily practice and meditation is bringing a newly found calm to his life. During this session we went over the upper body portion of the JFS and Wave Breathe.

4th Session – 21st May 2008

During this session, Steven told me that he has had to use ibuprofen twice in the past week for his neck pain. This is an issue for him since he tries to avoid taking medicine as much as possible. He does feel that the pain is moving now, though, indicating a vata condition. It is usually on the right side, spanning into the head along the side of the cervical and up past the C1 vertebrae. In the past few days, it has shifted to the left. We went over the upper body portion of the JFS using The Concise Book of Muscles in conjunction with the movements as a visual tool. He was fascinated by this and had many questions about anatomy and movement. He pointed out the edges of the upper trapezius and related that this was the exact location of the majority of his pain.

5th Session – 27th May 2008

Not much new to report. Steven is excited at the prospect of getting of a part in a play he is really interested in doing. He has been experiencing sore muscle pain coming from the clavicle at the insertion point of the SCM muscle. He has had no pain on the right side recently. He has experienced dissipation in the neck “cracking” In the past two weeks he has been spending a lot of time in quiet contemplation.

6th Session – 17th June 2008

Steven notes immediately that his neck feels much better and has only had to take ibuprofen once in the past three weeks since I have seen him. This is a great accomplishment for him. He says that he feels like he is being more mindful and that he doesn't know if it is just a “placebo effect” but he feels much stronger and better than before. In general his life is going in a direction that he is very happy with. He has been focusing on auditions and doing well with that. He has gotten the asana exercises up from 6 to 8 breathes each but during his vacation with his family he regretfully told me that he hadn't kept the exercises up as often as normal but he had gotten a lot of exercise chasing his young nephew around. He spent a week with his sister in California whom he says was a good influence on him because she leads a rigorously healthy lifestyle. During this session we went over each of the poses I had given him in our last session. In the time since our last session he had called me about bridge, which he was having trouble with since he wasn't sure if his knees splaying out slightly was a good thing in this position. A small correction, bringing the feet closer to the body and slightly wider corrected this. We added the neck strengthening exercise 7 in this session. He was shaking within 2 breathes and he felt a lot of recruiting in the abdominal muscles.

7th Session - 23rd June 2008

In the past week Steven has felt no neck pain. When he feels it coming on he takes a moment to breathe and relax and it disappears. He has been mindful of not focusing on stress seen in daily life and “taking it home with him”. He feels that everything is getting better for him and recently booked a job with a Pulitzer prize-winning play. It is the first time in his life that he has two great jobs lined up, one right after the other. We went over the neck strengthening exercise that we added in our past session. There is still a lot of shaking and recruiting of the abdominal muscles but it is not as intense as before. The shaking now starts at the bottom of the exhale instead of right away at the top of the exhale as before. He notes that it is difficult to bring the chin into the chest. We added the side neck strengthening position 3 times dynamically on each side. The right side feels stronger to him than the left. We talked about how lucky he felt to be able to not have to work full time and focus completely on his acting career and what a difference it was from a year ago when he was in a very stressful situation with his job. He observed that if he would never have been able to respond to yoga therapy as well as he has had this been brought to him a year ago.

8th Session – 17th July 2008

The past two weeks were busy and hectic for Steven. He has been rehearsing for a new play that he is in; he has a part that he is very proud of. He has been continuing his exercise program and feels that he is progressively getting stronger. He feels that things are continually “clearing away”. He still loves the joint freeing series. He feels that it helps him tremendously and always incorporates it into his routine. The last time he felt pain he took a few deep clearing

breathes and did a few neck exercises and felt that it completely “wiped the pain away”. It has not come back since.

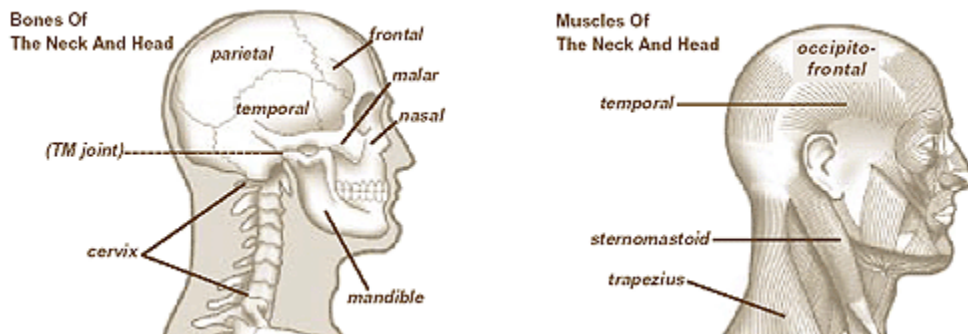
9th Session – 23rd July 2008

This will be our last session. Steven is moving to Mystic, Connecticut for a month to work on a play. He is sad that our sessions are over but happy to be leaving the “buzzing energy” of the city and its pressures to retreat to the quiet of Mystic. Steven was a wonderful candidate for Yoga Therapy. He followed instructions carefully and happily did his homework (I was very lucky). My feeling is that he did get better physically from the work he was given but the best thing for him was just to have someone to talk to about his stress and his feelings, someone who wasn't personally involved and was sympathetic. Tracing his history from where the pain began and talking through it was key. For me Steven was living, breathing proof of the most important part of Mukunda's Yoga Therapy teachings, which meant just being present with your client and remaining as sattvic⁹ as possible. When you truly realize the power we have as humans to help one another, you can't help but surrender to it.

⁹Of the 3 gunas, meaning pure, open, an empty vessel

2 a – Name and description

Misaligned Cervical Vertebrae due to bad posture. The neck is a delicate area. It serves as a gateway for major nerves, arteries and is a pathway for all of the body's meridians. In addition to that, the neck has significant amount of motion compared to the rest of the spine and has the job of supporting the weight of the head. It is less protected than the rest of the spine and therefore, more vulnerable to injury. Bad posture is one of the most common causes of neck pain and can cause misalignment of the neck, head and spine. Stress can be a major contributor to neck pain as well.



b – Gross and subtle body common symptoms –

Gross body symptoms:

Physically pain was felt in the neck and pinpointed along the outside of the upper trapezius muscle, most often on the right side but sometimes moving to the left and up at the base of the occipital bone. Tightness of the upper trapezius

Muscle on the left side caused a high left shoulder. Weakness of the SCM muscle contributed to a forward head.

Subtle Body Symptoms:

The movement of pain, sporadic attacks of it and different levels of it indicate a vata condition. Vata disorders are often caused by stress. Stress is largely ignored because we usually wait until it physically manifests as physical pain. One of the psycho-somatic persistent stress responses is muscle tension and pain¹⁰. Outside stresses of life can manifest as long term physical pain if not treated. Stress affects the mind-body balance and can easily become a threat to our health.

¹⁰Email handout from Mangala Warner: Staying Well in the Face of Modern Stress, Steven tan, MD, MTOM, LAC

c – Related challenges –

The lifestyle of an actor can, in general, aggravate a vata condition. Working, eating and sleeping hours are irregular. Running from audition to audition on a daily basis, consistently being required to perform and compete is demanding and can take its toll on the body and mind. Practicing pranayama can help to stabilize and balance. Steven asked if it was possible for him to run a marathon this coming September 2008. After consulting Mangala, I did advise him that it may not be a good idea at this time. Training for a marathon would aggravate Pitta, this, coupled with the fact that high impact sports are ill-advised during treatment for stabilizing neck pain prevented suggestion to go forward with his plan.

3 – Ayurvedic assessment Steven is a classic Vata. Vata needs direction and trust and treatment from someone who can treat them as a friend. Neck pain is Vata and needs to be stabilized with Kapha by building up stamina and strength. "Misalignments are a vata that is prana imbalance. In the neck region this is mostly due to misdirected udana prana - read, "I don't know where I'm going". By prayer and meditation, which is directed to helping you be of service to others and to deepening your relationship with the Divine Self, udana moves in the proper direction. By doing Yoga and other spiritual practices without the proper attitude (bhav) udana is unhappy. Udana prana generates our spiritual experiences of peace, light, and love.¹¹ Bringing Vata home is key. Taking a moment to "slow it down", relax, focus on breathing into the pain can relieve stress"

¹¹Mukunda Stiles, Question & Answers #1 – 4/16/01 www.yogatherapycenter.org

4 – Common body reading

Postural issues. High left shoulder caused by tight upper trapezius and levator scapula accompanied by a weak lower trapezius, latissimus and pectoralis sternal. Forward head caused by tight SCM and weak trapezius

5 – Contraindicated yoga practices

Asanas that put strain on the neck area:

Headstand – Putting weight on the neck can cause further misalignment to the vertebrae

Shoulderstand – An advanced pose that should not be practiced unless strictly supervised by an experienced teacher. If the neck is not properly aligned and the action of bringing the legs overhead properly assisted by the counterbalance of the arms the neck muscles can be easily strain

Halasana- Can easily strain the trapezius and contribute to further misalignment of vertebrae

Fish- Can cause strain on the SCM muscle and further misalignment of vertebrae

Movements such as neck rolls and any extreme movements of the neck. The neck is a delicate area of the body. Any position that puts strain on it should be avoided. Focus on elongating the spine during backbends.

6 – General recommendations for the condition

a – Therapeutic/free of pain

JFS with focused attention on neck movements. Wave Breath, Pranayamas for Pain. Continue with Yoga practice. The benefits of the practice includes an increase in: muscle tone, fitness, relaxation, flexibility, performance quotient, openness to experience, self-concept, self-esteem and spiritual orientation and a decrease in: nervousness, psychological complaints, health complaints, reactivity to stressors, tension and instability, anxiety and depression¹²

¹²Structural Yoga Therapy book, Mukunda Stiles. Table 2. Summary of Research into the Benefits of Yoga Practice

b – Stabilize situation

We discussed the specific stress he experiences as an actor going on daily auditions. From energy-wise standpoint it is an “all take and no give” situation. He goes on these auditions with high expectations and no financial compensation, only the hope of doing well and landing the job. There is a lot of competition and in many cases he feels harshly judged but he also feels that the rewards (when there are rewards) are of great benefit and in some ways he thrives on the stress of it all. Don't take stress home. After a particularly stressful day, practice Savasana for at least 20 minutes to replenish energy.

c – Maintenance

Physical: Continue with prescribed practice on a regular basis, at least 4 times weekly. Attend non-rajastic yoga classes that focus on breathe with movement and relaxation. Continue with regular vata-balancing pranayama and meditation practice. Once weekly or twice weekly gentle body work such as Swedish massage or shiatsu will give continued benefit.

Psychological: Vata needs trust and stability. Talking about issues that cause stress with a trusted mentor or friend can be of great benefit for this situation. “Holding things in” can only make things worse. Imbalances caused by stress can be neutralized using Vata balancing techniques that focus on breathe and relaxation

7 – Questions and answers on Yoga Therapy from www.yogaforums.com

Q – I have an additional question in regards to the forward head. Since I asked the question a student has come to my class who does have a slightly forward head, but in her case it seems that each time she takes her head back she develops a headache. It doesn't matter if she's lying on her back doing, sya cobra, or is upright in a pose like camel. I keep reminding people to keep the neck as an extension of the spine and not to crunch the neck back, but even a slight backward movement for this person seems to bring on the headache. Any insights as to what may be going on and how the help her with this situation?

A – On your student do you encourage them to elongate the spine before and through all backbending. Often just that simple image of decompressing will make a difference. Beyond that I would ask about whether she gets chiropractic adjustments or has a history of neck injury. If so then I would recommend the neck strengthening excercises cited in my book page 180. **8 –**

References and websites

Books

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Jarney, Chris. The Concise Book of Muscles: Lotus publishing and North Atlantic books, California 2003

Johari, Harish: Ayurvedic Healing Cuisine: Healing Arts Press, September 2001

Websites

www.yogatherapycenter.org

http://www.neurosurgerytoday.org/what/patient_e/neck.asp

<http://www.apta.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Search&template=/CM/HTMLDisplay.cfm&ContentID=24761>

10 – Biography

Joyce was introduced to Yoga in 2003 through her love of Shiatsu and Reiki. Suffering from depression and anxiety as a result from directly witnessing the devastating events of September 11th, she turned to alternative methods of healing to avoid pharmateutical relief. Yoga proved to be healing and inspired her to learn more about the body and seek the spiritual path that Yoga leads to. Joyce received her 200 hour Yoga teacher training certificate from Sri Dharma Mittra in NYC in October 2007. With great love and respect, she continues to study under the guidance of her teacher, Mukunda Stiles.