

# Upper-Crossed Syndrome

*The Number One Source of Shoulder  
and Neck Pain*



## Centre for Chiropractic & Sports Rehabilitation

An integrative, biomechanical approach to the everyday sports and spinal injuries.

### Physiological Breakdown

The upper-crossed syndrome (UCS) is a predictable pattern of muscle weakness that is present in all bipeds. It is an inevitable result of gravity acting on a human through his or her lifetime, though UCS is notably worsened by spending extended periods of time working or studying at a desk.

A combination of gravity and poor posture cause your neck flexors and scapular stabilizers to become weak. To compensate, your brain recruits antagonist muscle groups to perform functions that your weakened muscles can no longer achieve. These muscle groups—the upper trapezius, levator scapula, and pectoral muscles—become overactive. This unique muscle imbalance is a significant cause of shoulder pain, and without treatment can easily break down the mechanics of the shoulder and deep arm movement patterns, leading to shoulder impingement, tendonitis and bursitis symptoms, and even rotator cuff injury.

### Who does the Upper-Crossed Syndrome Affect?

Unfortunately, the Upper-Crossed Syndrome will affect every human over time; it is an inevitable result of gravity, and there's nothing we can do about that! We spend more time fighting against gravity as we age and therefore the UCS will affect us more as we grow older. Aside from the elderly, symptoms of the UCS tend to be more pronounced in those who work or study at a desk or in those who perform repetitive movement of the midback, shoulder, or arms.

### How is the Upper-Crossed Syndrome Treated?

While the Upper-Crossed Syndrome cannot be completely reversed, there is a set treatment that will manage your UCS symptoms *and* prepare your body to effectively handle UCS throughout a lifetime of desk work or repetitive movement. Treatment consists of first addressing the tightness in your upper trapezius, levator scapula, and pectoral group muscles. Once these areas are loosened, treatments moves on to strengthening the weakened neck and midback areas.

Loosening tightness in the body consists of soft-tissue work, active release, breaking up scar tissue with friction massage stretching, and physical manipulation. Friction massage and active release can be painful processes at times, but will ultimately result in healing. We recommend that you keep an icepack in your freezer at all times so that you can ice any sore spots after treatment.

### What can you do?

To ensure that you're your practitioner can make the most of your appointments, please come wearing loose garments. Loose-fitting tank-tops are preferred, as this will allow the doctor to access to your neck, shoulders, and mid-back and will facilitate stretching. Through the course of your appointments, we will prescribe exercises and stretches to do at home. These are integral to your progress, and we strongly suggest that you set aside 20 minutes a day to focus on your health by completing your prescribed exercises.

Adjusting your posture and work habits will have a hugely positive impact on the severity of your UCS symptoms. Set reminder alarms on your phone and decorate your office with post-it notes that remind you to straighten your neck, pull your shoulder blades back, and to get up from your computer every 20 minutes or so. Better posture—and improved health—will eventually become a habit!

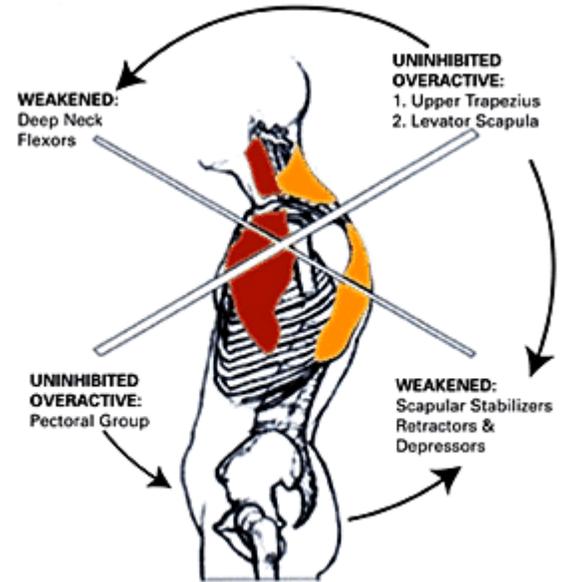


Figure 1: The Upper-Crossed Syndrome