



## Fenton Physical Therapy

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# Fighting Off the Tension Type Headache

## *Only The Strong Survive*



Rene had ongoing bouts of head and neck pain for three years. She worked at a bank and took care of her three children. In March, the head pain intensified and the medications she was using began to make her sleepy. She was referred for physical therapy by her family physician.

Rene reported her head pain was accompanied by neck stiffness and that her symptoms were worse at the end of a workday. She had pain with palpation of the suboccipital and cervical muscles. Rene was unable to fully turn her neck and she reported pain with correction of her slouched over, sitting posture. Manual muscle testing of the shoulders and neck revealed significant weakness.

Tension type headache (TTH) is commonly treated in physical therapy. It is characterized by cervical and shoulder muscle tenderness and tightness associated with head pain. TTH is one aspect of postural stress disorder (PSD). PSD is created by the prolonged static postures we maintain while driving, texting, computer inputting, and Kardashian viewing. TTH patients have neck and upper back muscles that are struggling to get through a day.

Physical therapy patients with TTH head pain often

report years of ongoing symptoms. The pain often varies in frequency and intensity but never resolves. They have tried multiple medications of muscle relaxers, anti-inflammatories, and central nervous system pain modulators. Many have been massaged, stretched, acupunctured, heated, and cooled. Most have never been given what they truly need and very few of them have attempted to correct their posture and get stronger.

A recent study\* out of the Danish Headache Centre, published in the journal *Cephalgia*, revealed that patients with TTH had significantly less strength in the cervical and shoulder muscles. Holding up a human head is a lot of work, and the intensity of effort is magnified when the posture used during the day is slumped over in a chair. Weak and deconditioned neck and upper back muscles will be unable to perform for a full day without complaining.

In the clinic, we see head pain patients that are unable to lift their head off the table without assist from their arms. They report difficulty holding the arms overhead or pulling the shoulder blades back. They are often reluctant to believe that this weakness is a sign of a pathological problem that needs to be remedied to resolve their head pain problem.

Rene was introduced to head pain relief activities and methods of posture modification during her daily tasks. After soft tissue treatment and manual therapy to resolve muscle irritation, she began a program of corrective exercises to improve neck and upper back strength. Rene progressed through the exercise program, and six weeks later, she had her first full week free of head pain in three years.

*\*Neck and shoulder muscle strength in patients with tension-type headache: A case control study.*

## BUILDING A BETTER HEAD SUPPORT SYSTEM

Listed below are three exercises we commonly use in rehab for patients with tension type headache. The exercises become more challenging as you move down the list. Go slow and be consistent. Make sure you are able to achieve a tight and tall posture before starting these activities.

-Michael O'Hara, P.T., OCS, CSCS

### High Medicine Ball Carry



This is a good remedy for the tech neck brought on by walking while staring at a phone. Hold a five to ten pound medicine ball at chest height. The hands are positioned on either side of the ball and you want to keep a squeeze on the ball. Stand tall with the chin in and

the chest proud. Tighten up the muscles in the upper back. Walk with the ball for 30 yards while holding that upright, head and neck position. Rest and then repeat for another 30 yards. I like to use a soft medicine ball so that no toes are at risk in the event of a fumble.

### Pilates Swan



Poor respiratory patterns often travel together with poor posture. The swan involves control of respiration and strengthening the neck and upper thoracic spine muscles. Lay on your stomach with the palms on the floor adjacent to the armpits.

Place the forearms on the floor next to your torso. Lengthen the cervical spine and keep the eyes gazing at the floor for the duration of the exercise. Let the gluteal muscles relax and keep the abdominal muscles tight. Push up with the arms and lift the head, neck, and upper thoracic spine. Try to lift up from the floor one segment at a time. The movement is slow and controlled. Inhale prepare, exhale lift, inhale and hold at the top, and exhale as you lower back down. Perform five repetitions.

### Belly on Ball Ys

This exercise will improve your posture, make your shoulders happy, and help you move better. The problem is that it's difficult for many people. As usual, the biggest reward happens when you conquer the biggest fitness weakness. Position yourself facedown over the top of a physioball. You need a fairly firm ball that does not flatten out when placed under load. Keep your spine stable and the chest off the ball. Lengthen the neck and thoracic spine (they should not move at all during the exercise). Keep the gluteal muscles tight and legs extended. Start with the arms in front of the shoulders on either side of the ball. The shoulders should be externally rotated in a "thumbs up" position of the hands. Raise the arms overhead like a football official signaling touchdown. This will create a Y shape with your torso and arms. Hold the arms overhead for three counts and then lower back down in a controlled fashion. Repeat for 10-12 repetitions.



## Additional Resources

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A  
One Day,  
Hands-On Event

Fenton Fitness & Athletic Center  
Fenton Physical Therapy

# Core Training Seminar

Saturday October 24, 2015 from 10:30am to 1:30pm  
at Fenton Fitness & Athletic Center

## Learn-By-Doing!



**Course Objective**—This Fenton Fitness/Fenton Physical Therapy seminar provides lectures and hands-on learning for those who want to minimize pain, improve appearance, increase performance for sport, or just become more knowledgeable about exercise and nutrition.

**Who Attends**—Fenton Fitness members, non-members, physical therapy patients, and anyone interested in learning more about the latest concepts in functional training and rehabilitation.

**The Format**—There will be lectures and hands-on training sessions that reinforce the lecture concepts.



**Cost: Fenton Fitness members \$35.00; non-members \$40.00**

### AGENDA—Saturday October 24, 2015

10:30am-11:30am	<p><b>Lecture 1: Core Training: Building a better butt and abs while keeping your back, hips, and knees healthy</b> with Mike O'Hara</p> <p><i>Lecture/Q&amp;A: Learn the what, why, how, and "what not to do" to improve the function of the team of muscles that make up your "core". Let this knowledge power up your training so you stay strong and pain free for a lifetime.</i></p>
11:30am-12:30pm	<p><b>Hands On Session: Core Training</b> with Mike O'Hara and Jeff Tirrell</p> <p><i>Participants will work with Mike on building solid core stability. Jeff will cover how to maximize performance and aesthetics by building strength and size in the requisite muscle groups: abs, obliques, spinal erectors, glutes, hip flexors, and hamstrings.</i></p>
12:30om-1:30pm	<p><b>Lecture 2: The World's Best Diet for Performance and Aesthetics</b> with Jeff Tirrell</p> <p><i>Lecture/Q&amp;A: Jeff will discuss eating to optimize body composition and performance. Nutritional requirements for caloric intake, protein, carbohydrates, fat, and fiber will be covered as well as how to adjust these to help reach your goals. We will discuss what good nutrition really is and how it maximizes body composition, health, and performance.</i></p>

**For more information: 810-750-0351**

## Pharmafat

### *Why You May Be Hanging On To Those Pounds*



The pharmaceutical industry is constantly producing medications to manage everything from allergies to insomnia. Our televisions are flooded with commercial suggestions on what to “Ask your doctor about \_\_\_\_\_.” If you are over the age of forty, it is good bet you are taking a lifelong maintenance medication of some kind. One in four women and one in seven men take a prescription with central nervous system effects that can promote weight gain. Medications are often the reason you have become heavier and may stop you from reaching your weight loss goals. Some of the more common offenders are listed below.

All of these medications have a documented history of adding pounds to the individuals that participated in clinical trials. Many of the clinical trials were of shorter duration than what is commonly used in the real world. Not all pharmaceuticals have the same side effects for all people. You should be concerned if you start a new medication and notice a five pound jump in weight over the course of four weeks. Consult with your pharmacist and talk to your doctor to find a medication that is right for you.

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**Deltasone (prednisone):** Oral corticosteroids are amazing drugs that can relieve pain and resolve the damaging aspects of inflammation, but they have a long history of adding unwanted weight to the patients who take them for any duration.

**Paxil (paroxetine), Prozac (fluoxetine):** Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) generally do not cause weight gain, but Paxil is an exception in the short term and Prozac with long term use.

**Depakote (valproic acid):** Used for seizure control, bipolar disorders, and migraine this medication causes weight gain more frequently and more severely in women.

**Elavil, Endep, Vanatrip:** Tricyclic antidepressants affect the neurotransmitters in the brain responsible for appetite control.

**Allegra (fexofenadine and pseudophedrine):** The antihistamine action of this drug can block enzymes in the brain that regulate satiety.

**Zyprexa (olanzapine), Clozaril (clozapine):** These bipolar and schizophrenia drugs have a history of causing significant weight gain.

**Tenormin, Lopressor, Inderal:** Beta blockers can cause fatigue and slow the metabolism leading to greater fat storage.

Please remember to always consult with your physician before discontinuing any of your medications.

-Barb O'Hara, RPh

### *Looking Ahead...*

October 20th is World Osteoporosis Day  
Fenton Fitness will be celebrating this event with special classes, information, and exercises to increase awareness and promote good bone health.