

ZEN Massage vs. Comfy Chairs



Dr. Helen Litovsky

Chairs, Bags & Heels

What's more damaging to the human posture than shoulder bags and high heels? The modern office chair! In it, we sit comfortably for hours at a time as our necks and shoulders strain to hold up our heads. While hard, wooden chairs made an hour of sitting unbearable, and after-school "de-tention" sound like an oxymoron, getting up, stretching and walking around was something we really looked forward to. Now with chair, desk, phone, PC, and coffee, we do more with less effort than ever before. But do you ever stop and think about how you're sitting? Does your profile resemble the letter "h" or a number "6"? You would think having so much practice sitting around, we would have mastered it by now, so how come the longer we sit, the more we hurt? Maybe chairs were never a part of nature's blueprint for being strong and healthy. The human body is meant to move, bend, lift, push, and throw sharp pointy things at wild animals. Yet, having such amazing bodies to do things with, we choose to spend most of our life sitting down.



You're probably sitting right now, looking down, shoulders rolled, head forward. Maybe you're leaning to one side, but for the most part, you're comfy. The tension in your body is focused in your neck and shoulders because your comfy chair or couch is supporting every other part of you except your head. As you read this, the weight of your head (~12 lbs) is held in place by a group of muscles in your neck and upper back, and no amount of comfy will make it lighter. The goal of ergonomic design is to neutralize the effects of gravity on your posture. The goal of gravity is to bring your head and the planet closer together. Let's at least give ergonomics credit for trying.

Stretching The Ouch

If you're getting a cramp, just stretch. Stretching prevents cramping. Ask your high-school gym coach. All this time, they could have been working for us. Leg stretches can be as expressive as a seated ballet, but you don't need a yoga class to know that leaning back in your chair with your arms wide feels pretty good, provided you don't tip over. The dominant muscles stretched are the pectorals (chest) and latissimus (peripheral back), and incidentally, these muscles contract the most when you're "comfy". This contraction forces your shoulders and upper back into a chronic tug-of-war.

The Working Stiff

While sitting in your office chair, looking at your computer screen, your lats and chest are secretly conspiring with gravity to ruin your good posture. They try to pull your shoulders down and forward while your shoulder and neck muscles fight back to keep your head level with what you're looking at. The weight of your head shifts forward, off the spine and onto your neck. So here's the rub: You spend all day in a comfy chair and come home completely un-comfy. Your neck and shoulders are sore and tight, and the best efforts of your friends, loved ones, or Sharper Image gadgetry only taunts you with temporary relief. Let's fix it!



Zen Massage Help!

In truth, chronic tension is more a result of how long you sit than what you're sitting on, but if vilifying comfy chairs gets your attention, ok. My goal is to get you to feel great and sleep even better. Tight, stubborn muscles demand a full, deep, prolonged stretch to truly loosen up, and you won't find this therapy anywhere else. ZEN applies stretching while your body is relaxed and in a neutral position. That means a deeper, longer, comfortable, soothing stretch. Combined with our trademark deep-tissue massage, ZEN painlessly opens and releases the fascia in your muscle, giving you the most enjoyable, longest-lasting therapeutic massage available. Visit www.ZenMassage.net to learn more or call (801) GO-RELAX to schedule an appointment.