The majority of dentists and auxiliaries working in the dental field experience some type of physical discomfort or injury. Research shows 82.7% of dentists reported at least one symptom of musculoskeletal disease in the past 12 months (Baltic Dental and Maxillofacial Journal, 2007 Volume 9, Number 1). The dental field is a high risk profession. Whether you have issues with your neck, shoulders, middle back, lower back, elbows, forearms, wrists, or fingers, taking charge now can change your day-to-day well being.

Most dental professionals either try to bear the pain, make minor adjustments, or simply accept this is a job hazard. Are you wondering:

Is there a simple solution?
Is it the chairs I sit on?
Is it the instruments I use everyday?
Could it be the angle of the light on the dental pole?

In fact, it is not any of these single issues. The root cause is the overuse of muscles and tendons you use every day while working – and not the equipment. Just like any other endeavor, the stronger and healthier you are the easier your task becomes. Did you ever think there would be a need to develop an exercise program exclusively for auxiliaries? Whatever program you consider must be specific to your needs and the reality of the demands to your body.

Our clients who practice dentistry have said to us many times: “I want to make sure my practice does not debilitate me as it has so many others I know.” Fifteen years ago when a dentist and client of Satin Wellness was diagnosed with spinal stenosis, we were asked by him and his orthopedic surgeon to develop an exercise program specifically to alleviate his pain. The combination of his back condition and the requirement on his body as a dentist caused us to step back and design a highly customized program. Because of such positive results the dentist asked us to expand the program to include his auxiliaries who were having similar complaints. Through this experience we developed a proven system for dentists and auxiliaries to alleviate and prevent pain.

As a dental auxiliary you have two major challenges – postural issues and repetitive motion injuries. As a short reminder let’s think of your body posture at work and the repetitive nature of the profession:

Neck flexion – consistent forward head bend and rotation
Shoulder blade protraction – rounding of your shoulders
Shoulder rotation – repetitive shoulder rotation
Trunk flexion and rotation – reoccurring bending forward and turning
Elbow/wrist/finger flexion and extension – repetitive elbow, wrist, and finger flexion and extension

Strength and flexibility are the two keys to proper posture and strong bones. Since muscles attach to bones by way of tendons, the stronger and more flexible the attachment the easier it is for muscles and bones to move.

We developed five exercises to address each of the five areas that affect those in the dental profession. “5 in 5” are five simple exercises and they can help reverse the physical toll caused by repetitive motion as well as postural injuries. They are designed to be completed in just five minutes.

1 NECK
Head Neck Retraction:
This strengthening movement relieves neck and shoulder soreness
• Sit with back against a chair and head against wall
• Gently retract your head and neck against wall
• Push neck in toward wall 5 times

2 SHOULDERS
Shoulder Blade Retraction:
This strengthening movement alleviates upper and middle back tightness/soreness
• Wrap theraband around middle of dental light pole
• Stand facing in toward light pole and bend knees
• Wrap band around each hand
• Pull elbows back behind you
• Pinch shoulder blades together and then pinch harder
• Complete 5 repetitions
Trojan Today provides a forum for industry professionals to offer a diversity of information and to provide ideas and suggestions in the area of practice management. These articles are meant to be informative and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Trojan Professional Services, Inc.

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3 LOWER BACK
Posture Seated Pelvic Tilt:
This flexibility exercise stretches the muscles in the neck, shoulder, middle and lower back and alleviates soreness in the same areas
- Sit with chair against a wall
- Gently retract head, neck, shoulders against a wall
- Flatten lower back against the chair
- Hold in abdominal area tightly
- Feel stretch in back of neck

4 ABDOMINALS & SIDE MUSCLES
Seated Side Stretch:
This flexibility exercise stretches the muscles on the side of the body and strengthens the opposite side
- Sit with perfect posture
- Retract head against wall
- Reach right arm up to ceiling
- Lean upper body over to left
- Feel stretch on right side
- Hold for 30 seconds
- SWITCH SIDES

5 ELBOWS, FOREARMS, WRISTS, HANDS & FINGERS
Seated Back of Hand/Forearm Stretch:
This flexibility exercise stretches the muscles in the forearm and back of hand discomfort.
- Sit with perfect posture in a chair
- Bring right arm straight out in front of you with fingers facing down
- Put left hand on back of right hand
- Pull right fingers in toward you using left hand
- Feel stretch in right forearm and back of right hand
- Hold for 30 seconds
- SWITCH HANDS

darkened shades. I rose and slowly opened the blinds and the room slowly began to be filled with sunlight. As I sat back down in my chair I could clearly see the tears filling Ruth’s eyes once again. She took my hand and held it with a gentle but firm grip. She lifted her head from her pillow and spoke very clearly, “The sun did rise this morning.” We both realized that simple statement carried layers and layers of meaning. We chatted a bit longer and I left to begin another day in other areas of the hospital. I did check in with Ruth once again later in the day and she left the hospital, without a baby, the next morning. I never heard from Ruth again. That is the way with encounters like this. They can be deep and intimate and they can be over as quickly as they began. I will never forget her. She reminded me “the sun does rise after a long night.” She nurtured my faith in a good world and reminded me no act of love goes unnoticed in the universe. To the casual observer it would appear I did very little that night. I had no magic to share. I had no brilliant words to soothe or take away the pain. I could offer no fixes that would make the loss go away. What I provided was a presence. I was another human being who for a few hours set aside my agenda and was totally present to a woman in pain. In that connection seeds were sown to remind her the loss of her child would not be the only chapter in her life’s narrative.

Often times we make our greatest contributions when we offer no advice or clichés. We sometimes add most value when we accompany another person through a dark night without letting go.

David E. Nelson, D.Min., provides “Appreciative Inquiry” coaching, consultation, training, resources, and presentations in order to encourage individual persons and organizations to be the best they can be and do their highest quality work. FMI: www.humanagenda.com or 816.453.3835.