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Backbreaking: Aussies report worsening physical and mental health as COVID pandemic continues

New research reveals a significant increase in Australians reporting both physical pain and mental health strain over the last 12 months, negatively impacting quality of life¹

- **Aussies are increasingly living a less active lifestyle:** Since the start of the pandemic, nearly half (48%) of Australians admit to watching more television, over a third (38.8%) are spending more time looking at social media on their phone with more than a quarter (26.9%) revealing they spend up to six hours a day looking at a screen.¹
- **Inactivity causing pain complaints to skyrocket:** Over two thirds (67.8%) of Australians have suffered lower back pain and almost half (43%) have complained of neck pain – with an overwhelming majority (90.5%) stating they experienced their pain in the past 12 months.¹
- **New pain having a detrimental impact on quality of life:** Over a third (39.6%) of Australians admit their pain causes physical exhaustion, loss of sleep (52.7%) and mental exhaustion (34.1%) with nearly one in 10 (9.2%) admitting to having problems with their partner because of their pain.¹
- **Protecting spinal health can improve overall wellbeing:** Ensuring correct spinal alignment and movement can reduce the risk of pain occurring and play an important role in safeguarding both physical and mental health.²

New research released today for Spinal Health Week reveals Australians health has worsened over the last 12 months with an increase in back and neck pain, as well as tension headaches, having a detrimental impact on quality of life including sleep loss, reduced productivity and tension in relationships.

Research commissioned by the Australian Chiropractors Association showed that over two thirds (67.8%) of Australians have suffered lower back pain, 43% neck pain, over a third (34.9%) tension headaches and a quarter (25.2%) experiencing migraines, a serious and debilitating condition - an overwhelming majority (90.5%) of these Australians stating they experienced their pain in the past 12 months since the COVID-19 pandemic began.¹

Dr Anthony Coxon, President of the Australian Chiropractors Association, said the increase in pain was not just due to factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic: "Increasingly, Australians are leading more sedentary lives making them more susceptible to injury and pain. Our research shows us that just under half (45.8%) of Australian adults are not exercising the recommended 3-4 times a week and furthermore, increasing activities like engaging with a screen such as watching TV or looking at social media on their phone. These activities are fine in moderation, but for too long, can cause pain and subsequent health issues."

High on the list of factors preventing Australians from exercising is work with a quarter citing their working hours (26.1%), a fifth citing their workload (21.3%) and family demands (16.3%) as preventing them from exercising more often.¹

"The impact on quality of life can be immense, pain can cause loss of sleep, lack of concentration, reduced motivation and infiltrate all facets of life including relationships and general wellbeing," said Dr Coxon.

Over a third (39.6%) of Australians admit their pain causes physical exhaustion, over half (52.7%) have lost sleep and a third (34.1%) reveal it has caused them mental exhaustion and impacted their concentration levels (31.4%).¹ Close to a fifth (17.6%) said it impacted their ability to go out with friends and nearly one in 10 (9.2%) admitted to having problems with their partner because of their pain.¹

It's not just physical pain with the number of Australians who have experienced anxiety or depression more than doubling in the past 12 months, from 20.7% to 47.3%.¹

"Physical pain and mental health can both manifest each other which is why it is vital to take a holistic approach to treating pain," said Dr Coxon.

This Spinal Health Week, Chiropractors around Australia are urging Australians to recognise the signs of pain and act to reduce the risk of serious injury and subsequent health issues.

"There are simple ways to reduce the risk of pain occurring and ensure your work/life set-up at home is not causing you injury. These include setting up an ergonomic work-station to ensure you're not hunched over a laptop as well as taking regular and active breaks."



However, Chiropractors understand that the constraints and pressures of a busy, working life may not allow Australians to practice positive behaviours that protect their spinal health all the time. It is because of this that Dr Coxon recommends the following micro-exercises that can easily be incorporated into everyday life and help safeguard spinal health.

The spinal health S.O.S

S	Stand up: Take phone calls on the move An easy and simple way to ensure you maximise your daily steps and ensure you take breaks from your computer screen is to stand up and walk when you are talking on the phone.
O	Observe your neck: And set yourself up for the day Start your day right by taking the time to stretch out your neck. Firstly, assume your sitting posture and roll your shoulders back three times, this encourages a positive posture as it will pull your chest forward and lift your head and neck. Next you can slowly bend your neck to each side, ear to shoulder - allowing for a deep stretch.
S	Squat: To strengthen your core To ensure you keep mobile during the day why not try three squats every 30 minutes. Squats are considered to be a dynamic exercise as they require several muscles in your upper and lower body to work simultaneously – and most importantly engage the core which makes it easier to maintain positive posture.

If you experience any pain whilst doing these exercises or are concerned about your spinal health, consider visiting your local chiropractor and get 'Back on Track' with your spinal health to help live a healthy and fulfilling life.

– ENDS –

This media release has been distributed by opr Agency on behalf of Australian Chiropractors Association.

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About the survey: A nationally representative survey of Australian adults was commissioned by the Australian Chiropractors Association and conducted by Pure Profile, to explore experience with pain, pain management and the change in physical and mental health in the past 12 months. 1,000 Australian adults from all states and territories completed the survey.

About ACA: The Australian Chiropractors Association (ACA) is the leading voice for chiropractors in Australia, actively working to further the profession of chiropractic through improving the health of all Australians.

To find your closest chiropractor visit: findachiro.org.au

References:

1. Australian Chiropractor Association, Consumer Research Survey: April 2021
2. Medical News Today. Accessed on: <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/314493> (last accessed May 2021)