Surfing injuries:
Neck & Low Back

One of the common complaints many of my patients who surf is neck or low back pain. This makes a lot of sense if you consider when we are not exercising we are on a computer, tablet, or phone.

If the mid back is in this position all day it will start to adapt to it. The more the mid back position changes, there is additional stress on the neck and low back. When you go to surf this comes into play when you are on your board. If you have difficulty extending your mid back then you will have trouble lifting your head to see when the next wave is coming.

Many of my patients will present with restriction in the neck going backward looking overhead. They will feel pain and tightness at the base of their neck and upper back. Commonly they will tell me about stiffness when they are trying to lift up their neck to look for the wave or pain after paddling to catch a
wave. Some will complain of headaches and even jaw pain.

Low back pain can also be a result of the lack of mid back extension. If the mid back is stiff and restricted then you will hyper extend at the low back either when you are lifting up to see over the horizon, paddling or popping up to get to your feet.

Another area of your body that may be affected is the shoulder. Since the shoulder blade makes up the socket part of the ball and socket shoulder joint, if the mid back is rounded or restricted it will affect the shoulder blade. The shoulder blades sit on the mid back so changes in the mid back position will make changes to how the shoulder blades work and that will affect the shoulder and the rotator cuff.

So how do you fix this problem? The first obvious thing to be aware of is the posture, whenever possible. Modify the sitting position; change positions before you get to rounded, get up more often, you know the drill.

Second, if you have access to foam rollers use one to add some mobility to the mid back.

Taking a few minutes at the end of the day or before going out surfing can help significantly. Only note I tell patients it doesn’t have to be painful to work. Put enough pressure that is comfortable and only a few minutes, more is not better. It took hours of sitting to create this postural change, a little every day goes a lot further than too much at once.

Third, go surf! Go out and paddle, being in this position with the feedback of the water is the best exercise. Initially you may need to go out more often for short periods of time. Only going out when
there is a big swell will probably be too much. Think of it as if you have not run for some time and going out on the first run and doing a 10K. Too much of even a good thing can cause an injury or pain.

If none of these solutions work go get evaluated and find out why the simple fixes are not working. We are always here to help so if you have questions give the office a call at 310-998-5800.

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