

# THORACIC OUTLET SYNDROME



Do you wake from a sleep to feel your arm tingling, painful and/or numb? Chances are you are sleeping on your arm, or on your side with your arm under your head. Not a nice feeling. Once is okay, but if it happens on a regular basis, chances are you are suffering from TOS. Thoracic Outlet Syndrome (TOS) causes signs and symptoms associated with the compression of those nerves that originate in the mid to lower neck (which bundle together to form the Brachial Plexus) and blood vessels in this same region. Clinical signs and symptoms of TOS usually include pain in the neck and shoulder area and numbness and weakness in the arm/hand. Putting your arm under your head causes compression (and therefore irritation) of those nerves and can lead to the symptoms described above.

Conservative treatment is recommended as the first line of care. This usually includes some life style changes, (keeping your arms by your side when asleep!) physical therapy in the form of Chiropractic care, and postural training during the

waking hours which may include muscle strengthening exercises. Most patients with TOS will improve with conservative treatment and only a small number of patients require surgery.

Just as complicated and harder to correct is mechanical posture. This is where the forward head, droopy shoulders and collapsed chest posture also causes compression of the nerves to the shoulder, arm and hand. Other causes of TOS range from Fibromyalgia to mechanical disorders such as hyper- and hypo-lordosis and short leg syndromes. Surprisingly, pendulous breasts in the female can be a causative factor by pulling the chest wall anterior and inferior (forward and down).

“But I have slept for years on my arm. Why is it now causing problems?”

In cases of trauma, we see symptomology near the onset of the incident. But some conditions slowly but surely develop. As we age our joints also age. We may not exercise as much as we used to. Or our nutrition may not be as good as it used to be. Perhaps we are under considerable stress. Slowly but surely we are building up symptoms.

TOS can also be associated with our work, such as standing in static positions for long periods of time.



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