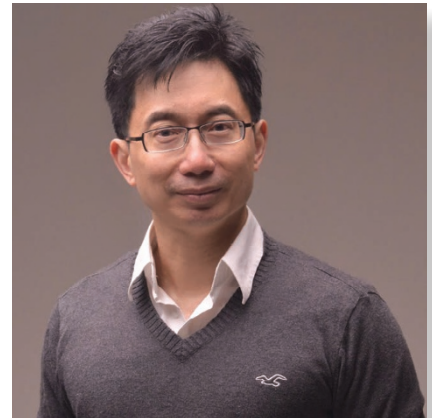


Helping dentists prevent poor posture and back pain

Jimmy Tang, from Newcastle Upon Tyne, is a dental associate in Peterlee and also a corrective exercise specialist, level 3 personal trainer and L4 sports massage therapist. An ex-back pain sufferer, Jimmy has a special interest in lower back pain and postural dysfunction.



I get up at 6 am and have wholemeal bread or porridge for breakfast – I try to eat as healthily as possible. I work at MyDentist in Peterlee which is about a 25 mile drive away. Six dentists work there in four surgeries; most dentists are part time.

I only work three mornings, Monday, Tuesday and Friday. I also spend time doing research into musculoskeletal conditions, such as back and neck pain, and writing articles advising dentists how to prevent these problems as well as improving their postures. I also write articles advising on nutrition, weight loss and exercises.

I qualified in dentistry from the University of Newcastle. I did not know why I chose dentistry, I just followed a friend who applied for dentistry as well. I started working as an associate dentist in various places in the North East before settling down after I purchased my own single-handed practice in Houghton-le-Spring in 1990. After 24 years I sold the practice in December 2015.

My lower back pain began when I injured my back when lowering a piece of luggage, which was about 15 years ago. I was out of action for more than a week. In fact, the pain was so severe it took me more than ten minutes to get out of bed the following morning. Thereafter, my back was so vulnerable that even minor tasks such as bending down to pick something up could trigger severe back pain.

I was naturally worried as I did not understand what was going on; although my physio helped me to alleviate my acute symptoms, no one was able to tell me the cause of my predicament.

The reason my back was so vulnerable was due to my job as a dentist – having to sit for

a prolonged period of time – and my poor posture.

Although physio and sports massage help alleviate my back pain, the pain continues to recur. A new episode starts as soon as the old one subsides. I was desperate to find out why but naturally, my physiotherapist wouldn't give me this information in detail as he wants me to keep going back to see him.

I realised that I had adopted unhealthy postures over a long period as a dentist but could not instantly change them. It will take a long time to correct these postures and it will take a long time for the 'unbalanced/dysfunctional' muscles to be normalised.

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I only work part time now as a dentist as sitting for a long time bending forward, protracting my shoulders when I treat my patients continues to exacerbate my back pain. In dentistry, procedures are taking longer due to increased patient expectations and we end up having to sit for a long time. This is particularly detrimental as it causes tightness of the hip flexor group of muscles which in turn switches off our gluteal muscles – leading to other helper muscles of the lower back doing the job for the glutes – causing formation of trigger points in these synergist muscles and subsequently lower back pain.

What I like to do is to inform dentists about what they can do to prevent neck

and lower back pain and if they are unlucky enough to get these chronic musculoskeletal conditions, how to deal with them.

I am studying L4 sports massage at the moment and am doing further research on how to deal with the trigger points that are the main culprits of lower back and neck pain.

When I am not working I train in the gym; it is important not just to do resistance and cardio exercises, but flexibility training as well. A balanced diet is of utmost importance. Indeed, there are three inter-related planks in any successful training protocol: diet (nutrition), rest and exercise.

I have just delivered a webinar advising dentists on the importance of posture to avoid back and neck pain. Eighty percent of dentists suffer from neck and back pain. According to Dentists' Provident over a third of the amount paid in claims to dentists is for musculoskeletal issues; in 2015 this reached nearly £1.5 million and in 2016 this was over £1.4 million. Dentists' Provident have around 250 new claims for musculoskeletal issues every year.

To relax, I exercise, walk my dog, listen to music and watch TV with my family. ■

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