



# Are you sitting comfortably?

It's not just your yarn that can get knotted. **Clare Kelly** explores how the Alexander Technique can ease a painful knitting posture

**P**icture your perfect afternoon – steaming cup of tea, a bar of the smoothest chocolate, your favourite film and, of course, your current WIP (work in progress). Sounds idyllic doesn't it? But imagine the scene a few hours in – achy shoulders, a complicated pattern and knots not only in your WIP but your back too.

Most of us have experienced the aches and strains from working in front of a computer all day – you might have even had a bout of Repetitive Strain Injury, but did it ever cross your mind that the way you knit could also be a cause for concern?

The knitters of Stitch and Bitch, Herne Hill, in south London are lucky. Tanya Shoop, one of the original members of the

group, is not only a fantastic knitter but also a teacher of complementary therapy, The Alexander Technique, and she has been able to share her knowledge with members of the group to ensure that no one is pushing themselves too hard.

But just what is The Alexander Technique? "It's a method of becoming much more aware of the whole self, the

body and its muscular tension and the mind. It's about learning to become more free and easy in all daily activities – it's more about thinking than doing," she says.

First developed in the 1890s by an actor named Frederick Matthias Alexander, The Alexander Technique has been used to encourage and maintain balance – something that is intrinsically linked to freedom of joints, breathing and posture.

This non-invasive technique has been

One such knitter Rosalind Wilson, a matron from south London, knows all too well the pain and discomfort Tanya is alluding to. "I know I have been guilty of knitting too much. In fact, at one point, the pain in my fingers and shoulders got so much, I had to stop. I used to sit and knit for perhaps six hours through two films and gradually, I would slip further and further down the sofa. "I thought that if I went to the GP, they'd laugh at

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said to help people in all walks of life from actors and musicians to sports stars and academics and many famous faces including Lisa Snowdon and John Cleese.

**Just one more row**

Hands up if you've set yourself a deadline. Whether it be Christmas or a birthday, telling yourself that something must be done by a particular day is likely to get you stressed out and for what? "Knitting is meant to be enjoyable. Take care that you don't have unrealistic deadlines to complete a knitting project if this causes pain or discomfort."

me, so I continued with the pain. It's only recently that I have discovered other ways to help ease it, but as I work in the medical profession, I must admit I was a little suspicious of complementary therapies." Rosalind recently visited Tanya's studio for a little guidance and discovered that there was a lot to gain by simply thinking about the way she did things. "Tanya noticed that my head was down a lot – probably from staring at patterns – and she helped me become more aware of the messages that my body was feeding back to me. I still knit for others, but if people want something as a present, they just have to jolly well wait!"

**Tanya's top tips for pain free knitting**

1. Keep your neck relaxed but not tight – your head weighs about the same amount as five bags of sugar, so your neck should not be tense.
2. Notice if you're hunching your shoulders but don't push them down immediately – just think for them to undo and release.
3. Watch that hands don't tighten – keep them as loose as possible as hand and wrist tension can lead to shoulder, neck and back tension.
4. Knit for little and often rather than for hours at a time – if you're watching a programme, get up and stretch during the ad breaks.
5. Beware of tingling or prickling, especially in the shoulders or hands and, if in doubt, always seek medical advice. ●

**More information**

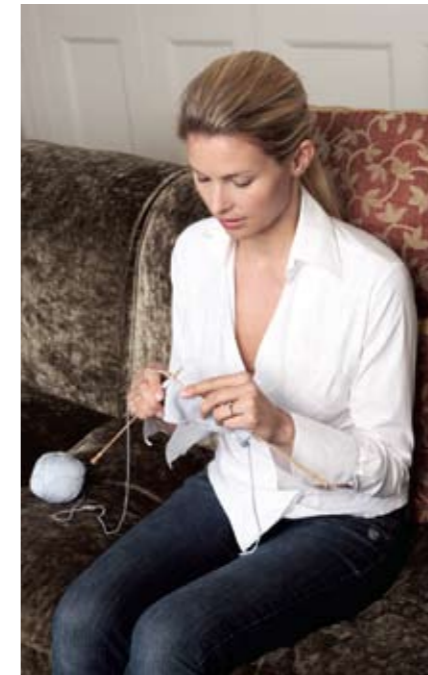
**Tanya Shoop** Alexander Technique teacher in South London and the City  
**Tel:** 07932 663 604  
**Website:** [www.freeyourneck.co.uk](http://www.freeyourneck.co.uk)  
 To find an Alexander Technique teacher near you, visit [www.stat.org.uk](http://www.stat.org.uk)

Release the tension Tanya Shoop shows how to sit and more importantly, how not to!

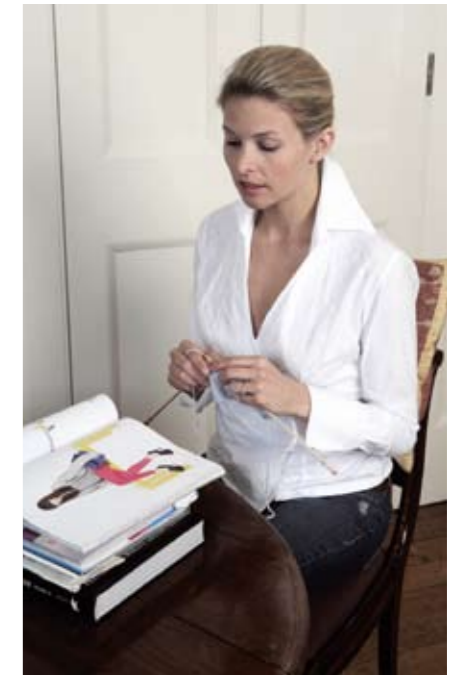
**Yes, purl-ease!**



If sitting on a chair, place a cushion at the top of your back to help support you.



Catching up with the soap? Again, use a cushion and don't twist your body.

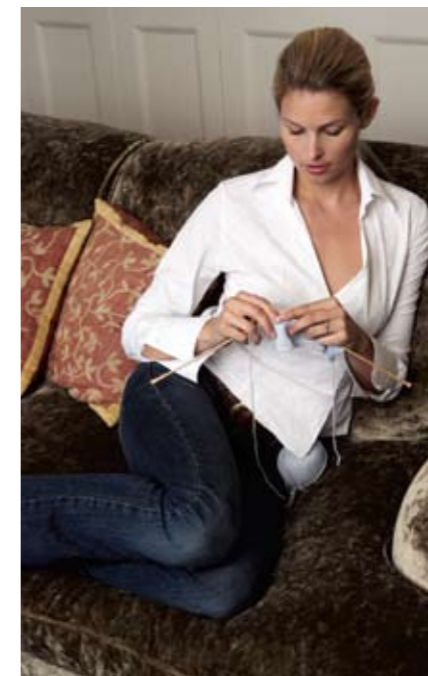


No need to strain to see your pattern, just prop it up on a stack of books or a box.

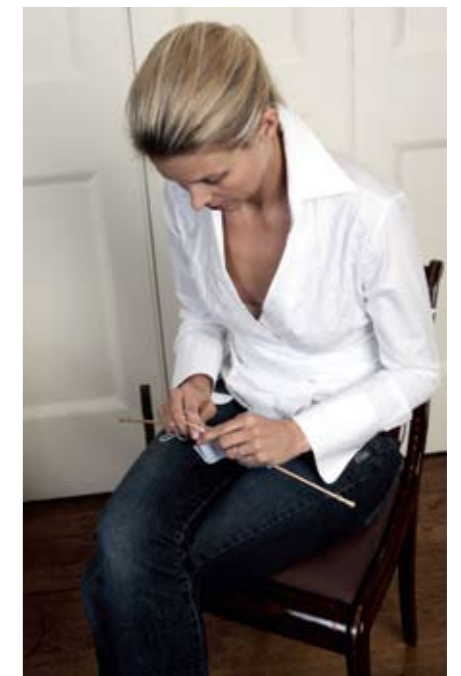
**No, thanks!**



Don't hunch over your work – especially in bad lighting. This will only lead to strains.



It's easy to sink into the sofa but be careful that you're not crossing your legs and twisting your body.



Again, twisting your body and dipping your head over your work is likely to cause discomfort if you knit like this for a prolonged period of time.

WIN!

**Relax & win!**

**1 Knitting aids**

Say goodbye to stress and strain on your hands with some square needles (from £11.95) from Kollage Yarns. Their unique design eases discomfort and stiffness for sufferers of arthritis and carpal tunnel. Phone **0113 266 4651** or visit [www.kcgtrading.com](http://www.kcgtrading.com)



**3 Tempting treats**

Indulge in melting moments with a box of your favourite chocolates for the ultimate way to relax.



**5 Lighting**

Harsh, bright lights can increase your tension, so opt for the gentle flicker of candles. Try Champney's Perfect Sleep Room Candle (£10), infused with essential oils, to create a soothing atmosphere. Visit [www.champneys.co.uk](http://www.champneys.co.uk)

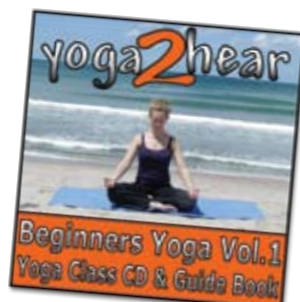
**4 Pampering products**

When the aches and pains start to set in, put your knitting down and enjoy a long soak in a warm bath with Radox Muscle Soak Bath Therapy and Vapour Therapy Bath Salts (available nationwide). Visit [www.radox.co.uk](http://www.radox.co.uk)



**2 Techniques**

Learn some basic yoga to calm your body and ease your mind at the end of a long day. Yoga 2 Hear CDs (from £13.99) make it easier to concentrate without the need to watch on-screen demonstrations. Phone **01438 228 500** or visit [www.yoga2hear.co.uk](http://www.yoga2hear.co.uk)



**Win our pamper package!**

Knitting has a special relaxation treat to give away. One lucky reader will receive all of the above products for the perfect knitting night in. For your chance to win our luxury gift set, send your details on a postcard to K64/Pamper package giveaway, Knitting magazine, 86 High Street, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 1XN by 30 June.

WIN!