

My name is [REDACTED] I am 33 years old and I have been in law enforcement for ten years. For approximately nine months I have been a part of Andrea Pollock's study.

Very early into my law enforcement career, I began having hip and lower back pain. I am 5'3" and weigh 125 lbs. The weight of the gear we are required to carry daily ranges from about 30-50 lbs. In my department, shifts are ten hours, four days a week. I have also noticed neck pain. With all of this gear, we must be able to sit and stand for long periods of time as well as run and engage people quickly if necessary. To alleviate some of the stress on my body brought on by the gear, I stretch throughout the day. I have tried using a special pillow to sit on to align my hips and spine properly and I try shifting my equipment from time to time. In my department, I have the option of wearing an inner vest carrier (worn under the uniform shirt) or an outer vest carrier (worn over the uniform shirt). With the inner vest, all of the gear is worn on the belt causing more stress on your hips. With the inner carrier, you have the option of carrying most equipment on the vest itself, causing more back pain. Rather than sticking to one vest, I have chosen to try switching them out so the stress is not limited to just one area. With this, you have to be very aware of where your equipment is in the event that you need it very quickly. I have been using the outer vest carrier for approximately three years. My back pain (upper and mid) since using it has ranged from moderate to severe, to the point that I cannot sleep and just turning in bed was some of the worst pain that I have ever had. I never realized that a career in law enforcement and the gear we must carry would cause pain and discomfort. Andrea has helped me to become more aware of my muscle pain, the causes and how to alleviate some of the discomfort. Presently, I am wearing the outer carrier and I am having trouble sleeping again. Switching to the inner vest will take away that pain after a couple of weeks, but then I will have to deal with the hip pain where sometimes just walking and standing is painful.

Of course with a career in law enforcement comes plenty of stress. Before meeting Andrea, I never thought of how being aware of your breathing might help with stress, or that the ballistic vest might even keep you from taking in as much oxygen. I have now learned to take time throughout my day to just sit in my car and take a few moments to breathe deeply. This helps to clear my head, relaxes me and yet, gives me more energy. I have always been exhausted after shift and would sometimes go to sleep for the night by 7:00 pm or at least have to take a nap. Now, I have enough energy to go to the gym after work, make dinner and then relax. I also love running. My breathing has gotten better and my running times have significantly improved.