

# Neck Pain

## Information and Exercise Leaflet for Patient's and Carers

### **What is neck pain?**

Neck pain is common and in most circumstances is not caused by a serious problem. There are several structures in the neck, such as joints, ligaments, muscles, nerves and discs, which can all be strained or irritated and have an effect on our comfort. Also, pain can arise as part of the normal and natural ageing process.

Symptoms can include pain and stiffness in the neck region, but it can also refer into the shoulder, arm and hand, as well as to the back of the head, leading to headaches.

### **What can I do to help myself?**

Importantly, the majority of neck problems can be improved and/or managed by maintaining a level of activity and using self-management techniques.

#### **Exercise**

Regular exercise is very important for necks, as it keeps the joints and soft tissues conditioned and healthy. It is important to carry out any exercises that you are given regularly. Alter the frequency or intensity if the pain seems worse at first with exercise. The body will adapt to them, and you will be able to build from there. General cardiovascular exercise, like walking, is also very important.

#### **Posture**

There is no good or bad posture, just what is comfortable for you at the time. If you spend long periods of time in prolonged positions, like in sitting (e.g. at a desk), lying down for a period (e.g. in a bath) or with activities involving working with your arms up high or looking up for long periods (e.g. plastering), you are better moving your neck and altering your posture at regular intervals. This can be done by alternating tasks and positions, or actually taking regular rest breaks.

#### **TENS (Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation machine)**

This is a small machine that gives out electrical impulses. These may help to reduce the pain.

## Pacing

If you find a particular activity aggravates your neck pain, you may need to use pacing. This means that you may need to spend a shorter amount of time, make a less intense effort, or less frequent effort. As the body recovers, you can then return to the activity. Over time, there will be less need for pacing as you progress.

## Medication

Take the medication prescribed by your doctor or advised by your pharmacist. Ensure that you take it regularly as prescribed, as medication is much more effective taken this way. If your medication is not giving adequate pain relief, seek advice from your local pharmacist or GP.

## Lying

If you wake up in the morning with increased pain and stiffness in your neck, you may need to correct the position in which you sleep.

A pillow should support your head and neck by filling in the natural hollow of the neck between your head and shoulders. Ideally only use one pillow.

If you remain in discomfort, you may benefit from a supportive roll placed inside the pillow case to support the hollow of your neck for example a rolled towel. This should go on the underside of the pillow at the bottom edge.

If you lie on your back puff up the pillow on either side of your head to form a hollow for your head and a thick support on either side of your neck.



If you lie on your side, adjust your pillow under your head and neck so that your head is level with your body.



## General advice and Information

- Do not roll your head around, and limit quick movements for a short period.
- Bed rest is not a treatment for neck pain.
- X-rays and scans are rarely required.
- Be aware that stress and tension can have an effect on the pain and tightness in the neck muscles. Try to reduce this by doing some general exercise like walking or try relaxation techniques.
- Avoid lying on your stomach in the early stages.

### Warning signs

**If you have severe pain which is getting worse over several weeks, or if you are unwell with neck pain you should consult your doctor.**

The following symptoms are rare but if you should develop any of them alongside your neck pain you should consult your doctor straight away:

- Severe pain in back, buttocks, perineum, genitalia, thighs and legs, and
- Loss of sensation, pins and needles or weakness in one or both legs and/or arms.
- Saddle numbness (loss of feeling in the body areas that sit on a saddle – buttocks, anus and genitals, inability to feel toilet paper when wiping)
- Recent onset of bladder dysfunction (inability to urinate / difficulty initiating urination / loss of sensation when you pass urine / incontinence/ loss of the full bladder sensation)
- Recent onset of bowel dysfunction (bowel incontinence / constipation / loss of sensation when passing a bowel motion)
- Recent loss of sexual function (inability to achieve erection or ejaculate/ loss of sensation during intercourse)
- Difficulty using your hands and/or moving your legs.

### Useful websites for further reading

- [www.arthritisresearchuk.org](http://www.arthritisresearchuk.org)
- [www.patient.co.uk/health/non-specific-neck-pain](http://www.patient.co.uk/health/non-specific-neck-pain)
- <http://patient.info/health/whiplash-neck-sprain>
- <http://www.elht.nhs.uk/departments-wards-and-services/Exercise-videos.htm> (The neck exercise videos are spinal videos 15 to 23.)

**Try to stay positive.**

**There is a lot you can do to help yourself, and remember that the majority of neck pain settles with time.**

# Some useful links to on-line videos for management of your spinal / neck pain.

*Permission has been obtained from Dr Mike Heinrich to allow access to the videos on Dr Mike's YouTube channel. Dr Mike Heinrich, Director of Operation, Evans Health Lab.*

**How to Manage Your Spinal Pain**

Low Back Pain

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOjTegn9RuY&feature=player\\_embedded](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOjTegn9RuY&feature=player_embedded)

**How to Build Exercise into Your Day**

23 and 1/2 hours - What is the single best thing we can do for our health?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aUaInS6HIGo>

**Let's make our day harder** - Review of some of the science around how our typical days have shifted with technology and culture and the impact on our health.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whPuRLi4c0&feature=player\\_detailpage](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whPuRLi4c0&feature=player_detailpage)

**Why your doctor might not have requested an MRI Scan**

Should you have an MRI scan for Low Back Pain?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OjZaN0s26xo>

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## PhysioTools

# Personal Exercise Program

Provided by : Physiotherapy Spinal Service

Sitting.

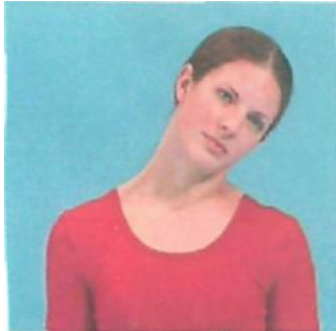


Bend your head forward until you feel a stretch behind your neck. Hold approx. 5 secs. Repeat 10 times.

Do the same, but looking up.

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Sitting.



Tilt your head toward one shoulder until you feel the stretch on the opposite side. Hold approx. 5 secs. Repeat to other side.

Repeat 10 times.

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Sitting.



Turn your head to one side until you feel a stretch. Hold approx. 5 secs. Repeat to other side.

Repeat 10 times.



Sit or stand.

Lift your shoulders - relax.

Repeat 10 times.

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