

Neck Pain Advice

Neck problems are rarely due to any serious damage or disease and the pain will almost always improve over time.

Causes of Neck Pain

Neck pain can be caused by a strain or injury, normal ageing or poor posture such as an awkward sleeping or sitting position.

Neck pain can also start for no obvious reason.

Acute Management

Do's

- Medications can be taken to help ease the pain or inflammation. Ask your GP or local pharmacist for advice.
- Try to stay active, even if this means moving more slowly or changing the way you do your usual activities.
- The use of heat can help with pain and muscle relaxation. Use a warm water bottle, or microwavable wheat bag, following the instructions provided when you purchased it. To protect your skin from heat burns, wrap the item in a few layers of towel. Leave in place for 10-15 minutes. It can be reapplied after 2 hours if you wish.
- Alternatively, the use of ice can help with pain and inflammation. Use crushed ice cubes or a bag of frozen peas. Protect the skin from an ice burn by placing the ice pack in a wet towel. Leave in place for 10-15 minutes. It can be reapplied after 2 hours if you wish. It's normal for the skin to become pink with either heat or ice, however if you experience discomfort or a burning sensation remove the hot/cold pack immediately. Don't apply heat or ice packs if you have poor skin sensation or poor circulation, if you are diabetic or over areas of infection or broken skin.
- Try to sit with an upright posture and avoid slouching. Get up and move and stretch regularly.
- When sleeping arrange your pillows in bed so there is good support for your neck and your head is held in a neutral position – see diagrams on next page.

Don'ts

- Immobilise your neck or use a collar
- Drive if your neck movement is significantly restricted
- Attempt any strenuous lifting

Daily Activity

Avoid staying in one position for too long or doing a repetitive activity for long periods. Try to change what you are doing after 15-20 minutes.

You may have good and bad days – this is normal.

Try and ensure that you move as normally as possible, guarding against movements can increase muscle tightness in the neck and shoulders which can lead to increased aching and stiffness. Trying the exercises provided in this leaflet can help.

Posture

Posture is important when experiencing neck pain. Here are some examples of good lying and sitting postures.



Lying/sleeping on the side:

- Make sure the pillow supports well enough your head and neck so that they are aligned with your spine;
- Place a pillow between your knees to help maintain a proper alignment of the lower back.



Sit with the head positioned comfortably above the shoulders – try not to lean forward. Use the back of the seat to support your spine. In a good seat, you should be able to allow the spinal muscles to relax while maintaining reasonable alignment.

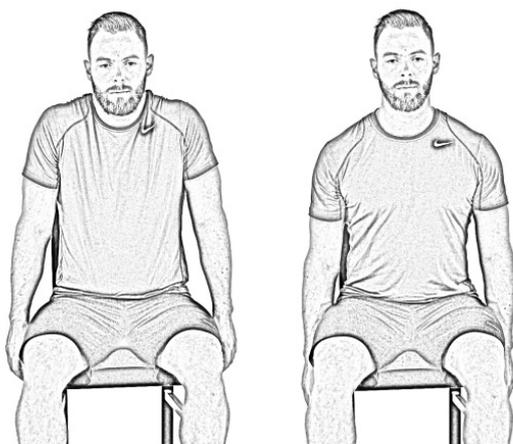
Exercises

Exercises are important to prevent neck stiffness, muscle weakness and may help reduce your pain. Aim to do the exercises 'little and often' keeping your neck moving as normally as possible. As an example, this could be up to 5 times a day for a few minutes each time.

It is normal to feel some discomfort while exercising however it should not significantly increase your pain. If you overdo it, you may aggravate the pain but you will not do any harm.

A rule of thumb is to do 'little and often' of what feels comfortable. As pain subsides build up your exercises and activities gradually.

Getting the movement back is very important – below are some exercises to help:



1. Sitting or standing lift your shoulders, push them down. Repeat 5-10 times.



2. Sitting. Turn your head to one side until you feel a gentle stretch.
Hold for approx 5 seconds.
Repeat to other side 5-10 times

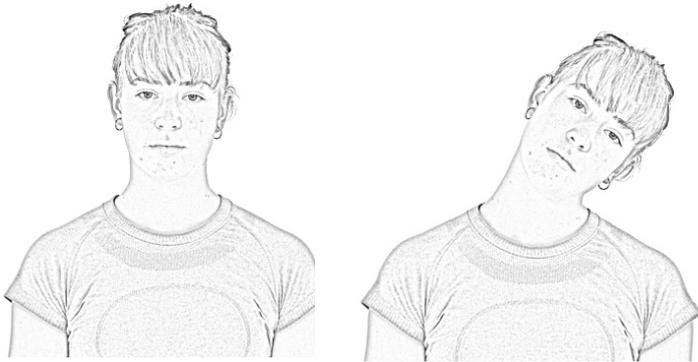


3. Sitting or standing with your head and shoulders touching the wall, slide the back of your head up the wall and tuck your chin in until you feel a lengthening down your neck.
Hold for 5 seconds.
Repeat 5-10 times.

Top tip - If you can't sit/stand with both head and shoulders easily touching the wall, try putting a folded towel behind your head.



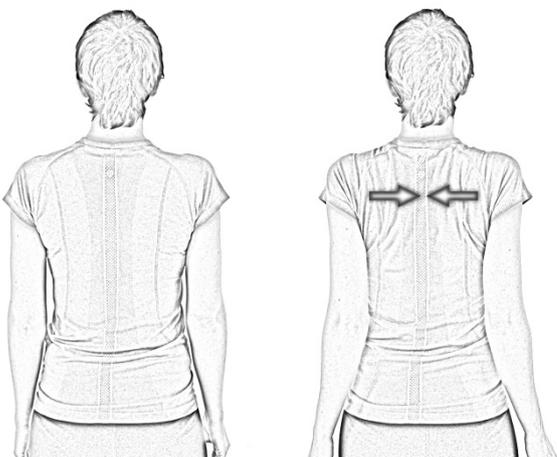
4. Sitting, roll your head forward until you feel a gentle stretch the full length of your neck.
Hold for 5 seconds
Uncurl your neck back to the start position.
Repeat 5- 10 times.



5. Sitting, tilt your head towards one shoulder until you feel a stretch on the opposite side.
Avoid letting your chin poke forward.
Hold for approx. 5 seconds
Repeat 5-10 times.



6. Sitting on a chair. Hold on to the side of the chair with the hand on the side to be stretched. Put the other hand over the head on the opposite side, touching the ear if you are able. Gently pull your head away from the side to be stretched.
Hold for approx. 5 seconds
Repeat 5-10 times.
Repeat on the other side.



7. Sitting or standing. Gently squeeze your shoulder blades together.
Hold for approx. 5 seconds
Repeat 5-10 times.

When to seek medical advice

Remember, most neck pain only lasts a few weeks and is rarely due to serious disease or damage. But there are occasions when medical advice should be sought. **See your doctor urgently if:**

- You have new headache, nausea, blackouts, dizziness or blurring of your vision.
- You are experiencing worsening numbness, pins and needles or weakness in one or both of your arms.
- Have problems with your balance or walking since your neck pain started.

If your symptoms are not improving during the weeks since their onset, contact your GP practice and ask for an appointment with the first contact practitioner (who looks after the musculoskeletal complaints in the GP practice).

Scan the QR code below to take you to our website.



Web Address: <http://www.cht.nhs.uk/services/clinical-services/physiotherapy-outpatients/patient-careinformation/>

If you have any comments about this leaflet or the service you have received you can contact :

Physiotherapy Department
Huddersfield Royal Infirmary

Telephone: 01484 342434 or 01484 905380

www.cht.nhs.uk

If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.

Potřebujete-li tyto informace v jiném formátu nebo jazyce, obraťte se prosím na výše uvedené oddělení

Jeżeli są Państwo zainteresowani otrzymaniem tych informacji w innym formacie lub wersji językowej, prosimy skontaktować się z nami, korzystając z ww. danych kontaktowych

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