

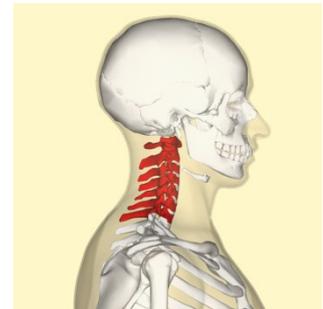
## Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Outpatient Department

### Neck Pain Advice Leaflet

This information leaflet has been provided by the Physiotherapy department. The following information will give you some advice and exercises to do to help improve your neck pain while you wait to start your physiotherapy sessions. If you have any queries about the information provided in this leaflet, please call the Physiotherapy department Monday – Friday between 09.00 – 16.00.

#### What is causing my neck pain?

When you have neck pain that has lasted longer than expected or keeps reoccurring it can be alarming. It can be very painful and cause much misery and disruption to day to day activity. It is important to remember that neck pain is common, but serious or permanent damage is rare. In most cases, pain is caused by a simple strain to a muscle or a ligament and should resolve within 12 weeks.



It is often difficult to find the exact cause of neck pain as the spine is made up of many components. The vertebrae are strong solid blocks of bone and are joined by discs enabling the spine to be strong yet flexible. The ligaments reinforce this structure and the muscles offer more protection. The interaction between all these parts after an injury can change the way we move which also causes pain.

#### Do I Need a Scan?

In most cases X-rays and MRI's are not needed. This is because often they do not tell us why our necks are painful. Adults without neck pain will have evidence of normal age-related changes such as disc bulges on their scans, therefore these changes are often not the cause of our pain. Only a small number of scans contribute to better management of the problem as recent studies have shown that around 66% of acute disc bulges reabsorb by themselves without the need for an operation<sup>1</sup>.

#### Lifestyle factors

There are many lifestyle factors that can have a negative impact on our neck pain. These include quality and quantity of sleep, muscular tension in the neck/shoulder region, increased stress and low mood as well as reduced activity levels.

#### When to Seek Further Advice

If you experience any of the following:

- Pins and needles or tingling on one or both sides of your body.
- Weakness or loss of feeling in your arms or legs.
- Problems with walking or sitting upright.

- Dizziness, fainting, double vision, problems with your speech or swallowing.
- An "electric shock" feeling in your neck/back which may go into your arms/legs.

**Contact your GP and ask for an urgent appointment or call 111 as it is important to rule out anything more serious.**

## **For the First 48 Hours**

Try to maintain a comfortable upright sitting position or if necessary, lie down in a comfortable position for short periods (e.g. 20—30 minutes). Avoid sudden and / or large neck movements, prolonged postures e.g. working at a desk; change posture regularly. If you have been supplied with a collar remove it regularly and perform regular neck movements (as per exercises overleaf) to prevent excess stiffness. As your symptoms ease it is important that you wean yourself off the collar.

## **Heat**

You may find that applying heat to the sore area helps relieve your pain and any associated muscular tightness/spasm. Use a microwaveable wheat bag or a hot water bottle wrapped in a towel. Keep it on for 15 – 20 minutes, checking your skin regularly to minimise the risk of suffering a burn. Repeat up to three times a day.

## **Posture**

There is increasing evidence that posture does not contribute to neck pain as much as we once thought. Very few people have perfect posture all of the time and what does appear to contribute to neck pain is holding our bodies in sustained positions for extended periods of time e.g. sitting at an office desk or watching TV on the sofa. Try to avoid sustained positions and gently move your neck and your whole body regularly to help prevent stiffness. See exercises overleaf. It is important to consider your daily routine. Simple changes can make a big difference.

## **Medication**

Do not be afraid to take painkillers to enable you to stay active. Your body's warning systems will not be affected and will still warn you if you are putting yourself at increased risk of aggravating your neck. Taken properly, simple painkillers can be most effective and allow you to keep moving. Your GP or Pharmacist can advise you how you can use medication to manage your neck pain.

## **Driving**

It is important to consider whether your neck pain / stiffness will prevent you from turning your head quickly and checking your blind spots when driving. You may return to driving once when you feel confident that you can safely control your vehicle and perform all manoeuvres. It is advisable to inform the DVLA and your insurance company that you are returning to driving.

## **Smoking**

Evidence has shown that smoking prolongs healing time. Stopping smoking during the healing phase will help ensure optimal recovery from this injury. For advice on smoking cessation and local support available, please refer to the following website: <http://smokefree.nhs.uk> or discuss this with your GP.

## **Further information**

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy: <https://www.csp.org.uk/conditions/neck-pain>

Versus Arthritis: <https://www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/conditions/neck-pain/>

## Exercises for Neck Pain

Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Outpatient Department Telephone: 01603 286990



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The aim of these exercises is to reduce your pain, increase movement and help restore normal function.

It is important that you do not push through pain that you would describe as being more than a 5/10.

Any pain or discomfort after you have stopped exercising should settle down within 1 hour of you stopping the exercises. If your pain is still worse as a result of the exercises, you could be overdoing them, try moving your neck more gently and slowly and consider doing fewer repetitions.

The exercises should be carried out little and often 3 – 4 times a day and only move as far as pain allows.



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Lying on your back with your head flat or on a small flat pillow or towel. Lengthen the back of your head up the pillow, gently nodding your chin. Feel your neck grow longer. Try to do this with the minimal amount of effort or tension in your neck muscles. Hold approx. 5 secs. Repeat 5 times.

**START POSITION:** Sit tall on a chair or stool with the back of the head and the shoulder blades on the wall. The shoulders should be relaxed mid position and the plane of the face should be vertical. If possible, have your lower back against the wall as well. Feet flat on the floor. Arms relaxed on your lap.



**ACTION:** Gently push down through your feet, lengthen through your whole spine and slowly slide the back of the head up the wall. Keep looking forwards as you gently nod you chin down slightly. Move minimally, only as far as there is no obvious increase in tension of the neck muscles.

Hold for 5 seconds. Slowly ease out of the position. Repeat 3 - 5 times little and often through the day.



## Exercises for Neck Pain

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Keeping your back straight, as above, lengthen the back of your head, keep looking forwards as you gently nod your chin down slightly. Move minimally, only as far as there is no obvious increase in tension of the neck muscles.

Hold this position to feel a stretch for 5 seconds or stop if pain starts. Slowly ease out of the position. Repeat 3 - 5 times little and often through the day.



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Lift your head, lengthening your neck as you turn your head slowly and gently to one side until you feel a stretch. Do not push through pain and do not worry if you cannot turn your head as far as the picture demonstrates.

Hold for approx. 5 secs. Repeat 3 - 5 times. Repeat turning your head to the other side.



In sitting, with your back straight slowly lower one ear gently down towards your shoulder to feel a gentle stretch in the muscles on the other side of your neck. Do not push through pain.

Hold the stretch for 5 – 10 seconds and then gently return to the starting position. Repeat 3 – 5 times little and often throughout the day.

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