

Neck pain

What causes Neck pain?

Neck pain is common even without an accident or injury and is rarely due to any serious disease. Your neck is strong and robust. Most neck pain will resolve in a few weeks by itself.

Your symptoms may start following a simple strain, or following an injury such as a whiplash. It also may start for no apparent reason. Many other factors such as joint stiffness, muscle tension, inactivity/sedentary lifestyle, sustained postures, poor sleep, stress and anxiety can all contribute to your neck pain.

Symptoms

Pain and stiffness which can be central, one sided or may travel to your shoulder and shoulder blade.

You may experience numbness and pins and needles into your arm and sometimes into your hand.

You may hear clicking and grating on moving your neck, this can sound alarming but is not serious. Try not to worry.

What can I do to help?

Stay active. Try to avoid spending long periods lying down during the day.

Try to maintain your usual activities and stay at work if possible.

You may find simple pain medication will allow you to move more comfortably and help your recovery. Speak to your pharmacist for advice if required.

Keeping your neck moving is an essential part of your recovery. You could try the exercises overleaf to get you started.

Try and identify other factors that may be contributing to your pain such as managing any stress, getting a good night's sleep or trying some relaxation strategies.

When should I ask for help?

Seek advice from your GP / physiotherapist if:

- You feel unwell, are experiencing night sweats or have a high temperature.
- Your pain is worsening and is not manageable.
- If you are experiencing new problems with your balance, walking or loss of coordination.
- If you have developed new visual problems such as double vision, dizziness, blackouts, difficulty with speech and swallowing.
- Loss of power/function in one or both arms

Exercises

Remember general exercise is the most helpful way to ease your symptoms. However, sometimes doing some simple stretching exercises can help you feel more confident to move.

Start with a few repetitions and increase as you feel able. You could try repeating the exercises 3-4 x a day or as often as you feel beneficial.



Head turns

Keeping your shoulders relaxed turn your head to one side as if looking over your shoulder and then repeat to the other



Head tilts

Keeping your shoulders relaxed, tilt your head to one side and then repeat to the other. You may feel a gentle stretch on the top of your shoulder



Looking up

Tilt your head back as you look towards the ceiling



Neck flexion

Allow your head to bend forwards moving your chin towards your chest

References:

Neck pain – non-specific; NICE guidelines 2018
Finucan L, Downie A et al (2020) International Framework for Red Flags for Potential Serious Spinal

Production date: August 2023
Review date: August 2026
Responsibility for Physiotherapy
Leaflet reference: PIL/CG/0824
Version: 2.0

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