

Neck Pain

Service User Information Leaflet

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Produced by Fife Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Service

Diagrams: © PhysioTools

What is neck pain?

Neck pain is a common problem which has many causes. These include trauma or injury, worry and stress, poor posture or sleeping in an awkward position, or prolonged use of a computer keyboard. For most people, no specific reason for the pain is found.

What are the symptoms?

These may include:

- General pain in your neck area which may radiate to your shoulder or between your shoulder blades, out into your arm or up to your head causing a headache.
- Tension in the muscles of your neck.
- Abnormal neck posture or difficulty moving your neck normally.
- Weakness or altered sensation in one or both of your arms.

How is it treated?

What you do in the early stages of your injury can affect your recovery. Most injuries are not serious and the pain will improve over time. It is important to keep your neck moving whilst it is recovering. This will help prevent stiffness and help improve your symptoms faster. Keeping generally active will help.

The first few days:

- Take pain medication for pain relief. Connect your local pharmacy or GP if other medication is required.
- Try to stay active. This may mean you have to change your activities slightly.
- Some people find heat or ice packs helpful. Cover the heat or ice pack with a damp towel. Leave it on for up to 10 minutes and during this time check it regularly. Do not use this if you have loss of skin sensation or skin problems.
- You may be more comfortable if you support your lower back with a rolled up towel and sit in a supported chair.
- You may find it difficult to get comfortable in bed so use pillows to help support your neck. Sleeping on your back or side provides a better position for your neck.
- Research shows that using a neck collar delays recovery.
- Tense muscles, caused by anxiety and stress can increase the amount of discomfort you feel. You may find exercise, controlled breathing and relaxation helpful to do.

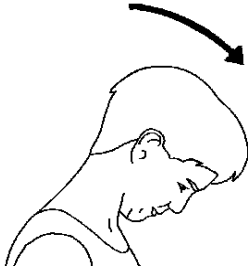
Please see your GP if you do not manage to get back to most normal activities within 6 weeks. Or your neck is not recovering at the rate that you expect.

Early exercises

Repeat each movement up to 10 times every 1-2 hours or as your pain allows. Avoid rolling your head round.

Any initial neck pain you experience when carrying out the exercises will decrease as your neck movement improves and becomes easier.

If the pain seems to be getting worse reduce the number of exercises you do and do smaller movements until the pain improves.



In sitting. Bend your head forward until you feel a stretch behind your neck.

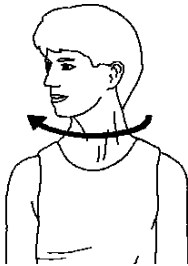
Hold for approximately 5 to 10 seconds.



In sitting. Tilt your head toward one shoulder until you feel the stretch on the opposite side.

Hold for approximately 5 to 10 seconds.

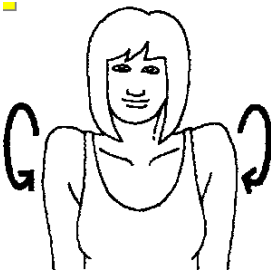
Repeat to other side.



In sitting. Turn your head to one side until you feel a stretch.

Hold for approximately 5 to 10 seconds.

Repeat to the other side.



In sitting or standing. Roll your shoulders in both directions.

Repeat 5 to 10 times in each direction.

Please see your GP if you do not manage to get back to most normal activities within 6 weeks. Or your neck is not recovering at the rate that you expect.

For Further Advice:

www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/muscle-bone-and-joints