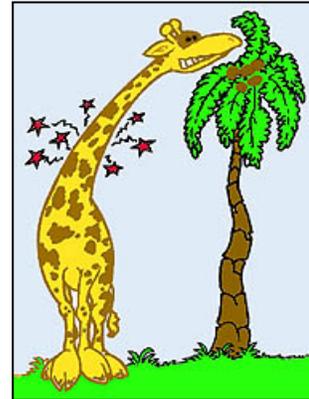


# It's a Pain In the Neck!

## Problems and solutions for your neck and shoulders

By Tamara Mitchell



It's not surprising that the neck is a very common area for pain. The neck is a narrow, flexible structure of nerves, bones, joints, cartilage, blood vessels and muscles which must hold up the head, which weighs 10-15 lbs. Neck pain rivaled lower back pain as the #1 reported symptom almost every year in our records reported in the past 17 years. In this article, we'll look briefly at the structure of the neck, sources of neck problems, ways to prevent neck problems, and treatments for neck pain and problems.

### Should you seek medical attention?

Neck pain isn't usually a serious medical concern and it usually eases on its own or with simple treatment.<sup>1</sup> Neck pain can indicate some rare, but severe problems, so before launching into our discussion, we need to preface it with a few cautions. If you have any of the following symptoms, seek medical attention rather than attempting self-treatment because time could mean a matter of life or death, or at least avoiding further damage to an injured structure.

#### 911 Emergency:

- If, in addition to your neck pain, you have a fever, rash, sensitivity to light, headache, or nausea, *and* your neck is so stiff that you cannot touch your chin to your chest, you should go to the emergency room immediately. These are signs of meningitis (a potentially deadly infection of the brain) that should be investigated without hesitation.<sup>2,3</sup>
- If you have shortness of breath, sweating, nausea, vomiting, drowsiness, arm or jaw pain, you should go to any emergency room immediately. These are signs of a heart attack.<sup>2,3</sup>
- If your neck pain was caused by a fall, flow, or injury and if you cannot move your arm or hand.<sup>2</sup> This is sign of severe nerve injury.

#### Seek medical care right away:

- If you have swelling, a lump, or deformity, including the appearance of a sunken area, seek medical attention right away. Swelling may affect a whole limb, such as a whole arm, or just the neck. Dislocation or fracture of a neck bone structure, or a swollen gland may cause such swelling and should be checked out by a medical professional.<sup>2</sup>

#### Visit your doctor or health practitioner:

- If you have severe or worsening neck pain, dizziness, numbness, weakness, coolness, or color changes in your limbs, you should seek medical attention before attempting self-care.<sup>1,2</sup> These are signs that the blood flow to your limbs and/or brain are being restricted, that nerves are being pinched, or that muscles have been damaged. You should receive medical help without question.<sup>1,2</sup>
- Make an appointment if symptoms do not go away in 1 week with self-care, you have swollen glands or a lump in your neck, pain doesn't go away with over-the-counter medication, you have difficulty swallowing or breathing, the pain is chronic and severe, you lose control over urination or bowel movements, or you have trouble walking and balancing.<sup>1,2,4</sup>

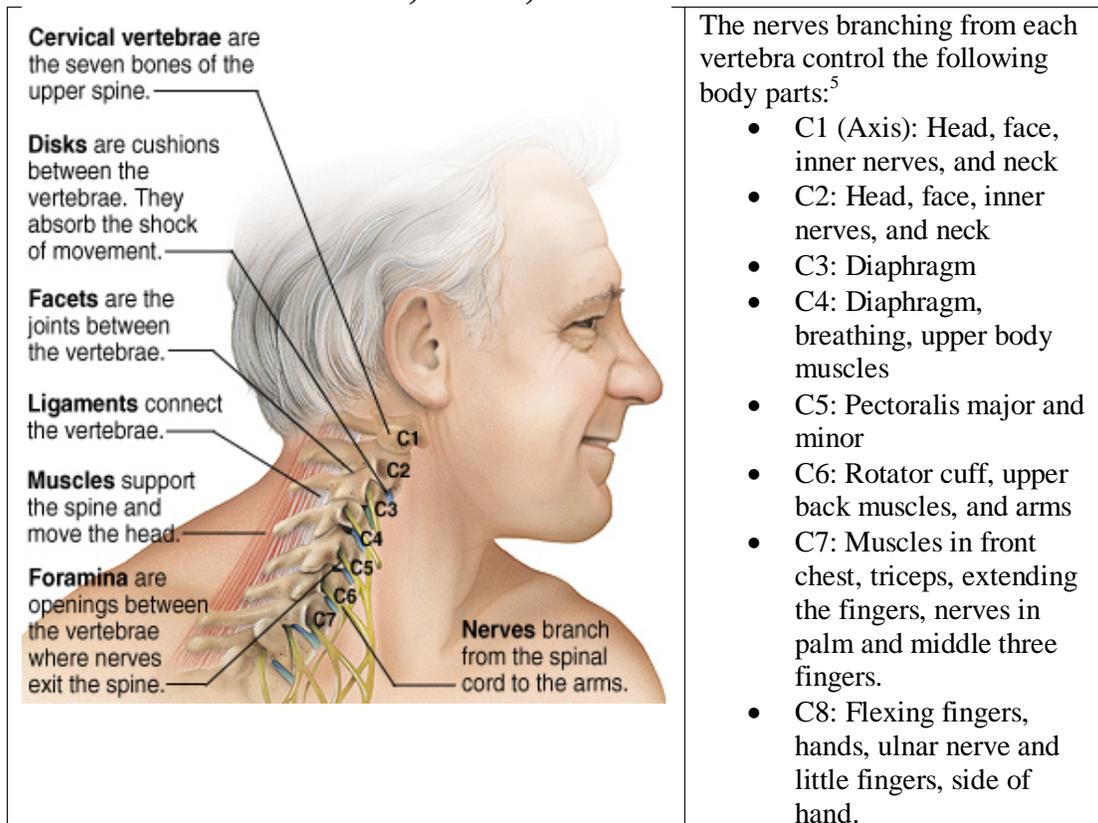
## Structure

Neck pain may originate from any of the structures in the neck: bone, nerves, disks, ligaments, or muscles. Neck pain may also come from regions near the neck, like the shoulder, jaw, and upper arms.<sup>4</sup> To make things even more confusing, problems in the structures of the neck may not involve neck pain at all, but may result in pain, numbness, and/or tingling, most typically in the arm or hands affected by a nerve or disc being pinched in the cervical spine.<sup>2,5</sup> For instance a nerve affected in the C8 vertebra may cause pain, numbness, or tingling in the elbow or little finger.<sup>5</sup>

Neck pain is highly associated with headaches, both migraines and tension headaches.<sup>6</sup> Neck pain is reported in close to 90% of tension headaches and a little over 75% of migraines.<sup>6</sup> In addition, myofascial tenderness is significantly increased in people with neck pain.<sup>6</sup>

Looking at the illustrations below, you may recognize the origin of your pain. It may feel like it's a specific vertebra or a specific tight muscle. This can help you zone in on what your treatment approach may be.

### *Bones, nerves, discs in the neck*



Illustration, information References 7,8

## *Muscles in the neck*

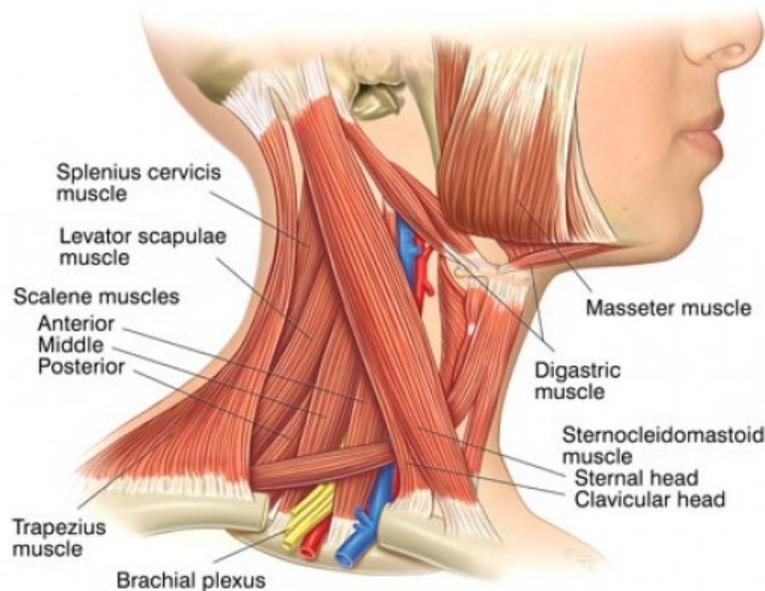


Illustration courtesy of Reference 9

### **What causes neck pain?**

There is a lot of complexity in the neck and if any of these structures is malfunctioning, it can cause problems for you. Neck pain also has strong cognitive and emotional associations, so the problem is often multidimensional and doesn't always correlate with medical diagnoses of structural pathology.<sup>10</sup> Diagnosing the source of neck pain is often quite problematic, but the most common sources are discussed below.<sup>10</sup> Top problems are:<sup>4</sup>

- Muscle strains and spasms from overuse, poor posture, sleeping in an uncomfortable position, or twisting or turning your neck in a jarring manner while exercising.
- Degeneration. Worn joints and osteoarthritis. The cartilage between the vertebrae and subsequent bone spurs affect motion and cause pain. Discs dry out and become thinner with aging reducing their ability to absorb shock from body movements.<sup>11</sup>
- Nerve compression from herniated discs or bone spurs can press on nerves branching from the spinal cord.
- Injuries such as whiplash from auto accidents.
- Medical conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, fibromyalgia, meningitis, or cancer.

*Postural stress.* The most common trigger of neck pain stems from incorrect postures or movements.<sup>1,4,9,10,12</sup> In one study, over 43% of the respondents identified that they felt that posture was the primary trigger for their neck pain.<sup>10</sup> In the illustration below, notice the natural curve of the neck in the upright, balanced posture. (The use of x-rays for diagnosis of misalignments by chiropractors is no longer recommended on a routine basis.<sup>13</sup>)

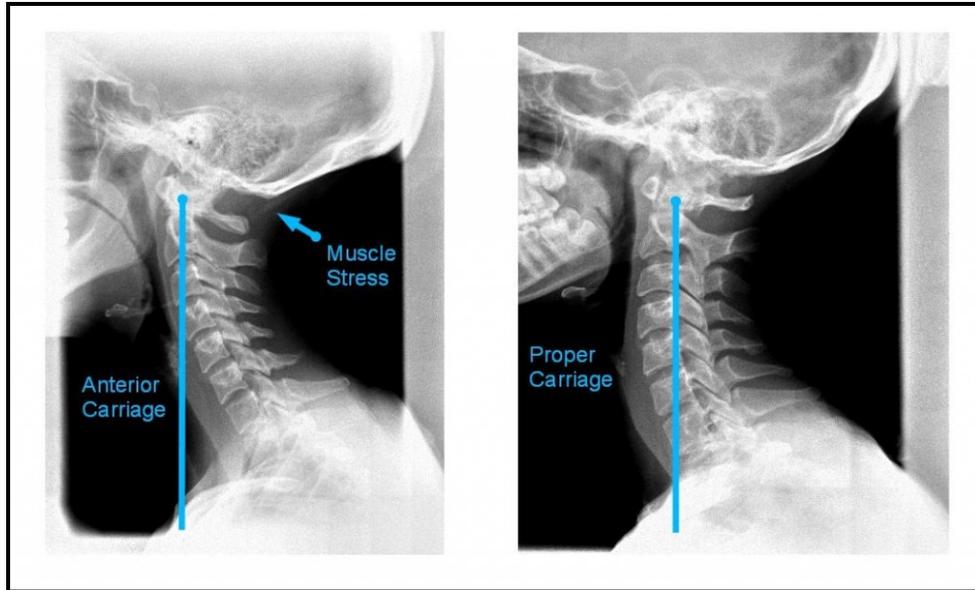


Illustration courtesy of Reference 14

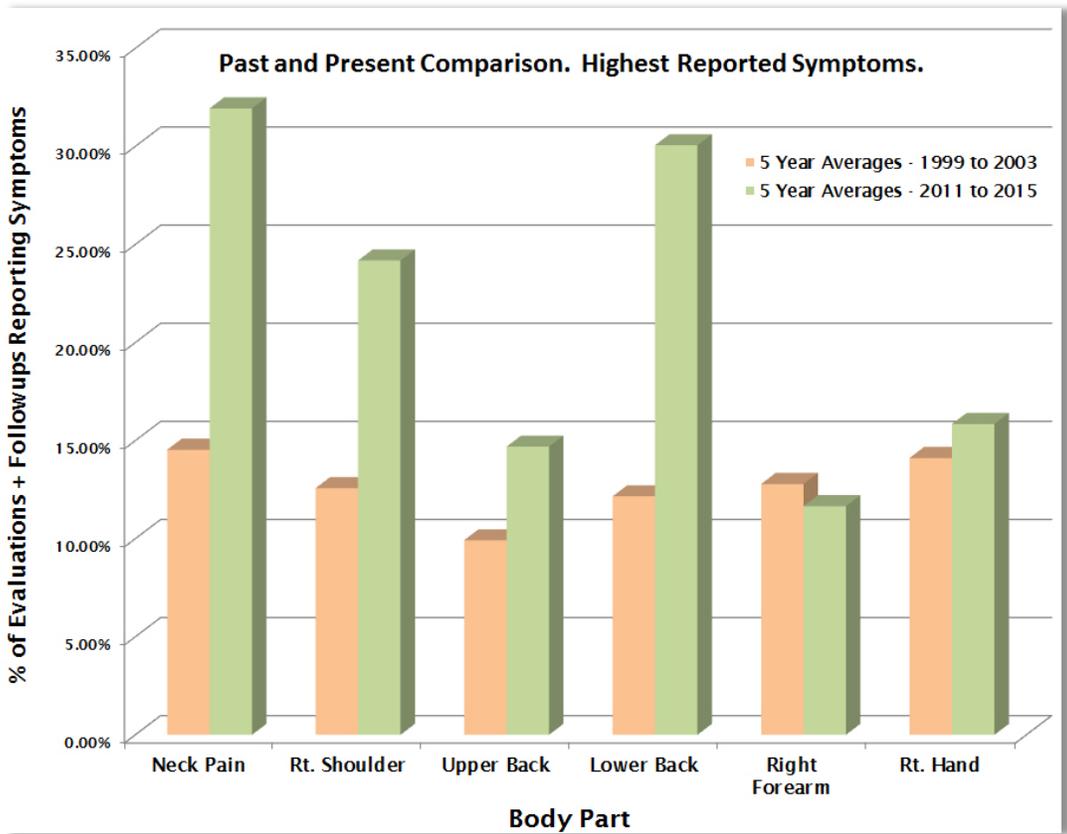
Pain is usually a result of muscle strain or tension arising from everyday activities such as bending over a desk for hours, using a handheld device too much, having poor posture while watching TV or reading, placing the computer monitor too high or too low, sleeping in an uncomfortable position, or twisting and turning the neck in a jarring manner.<sup>1,2,15,16</sup> Improper postures can increase the amount of stress placed on the muscles, ligaments, facets, and discs in and surrounding your neck, resulting in pain.<sup>15</sup>

Holding the head forward can contribute to headaches, muscle spasms, and chronic neck pain with symptoms extending into the upper back, shoulders, and arms.<sup>15</sup> When muscles are tight and tense, blood and lymph cannot feed the muscles with nutrients and oxygen necessary for their functioning, and waste products generated by the cells and muscles cannot be carried away.<sup>17</sup> These neck problems can lead to chronic muscular tightness, scar tissue buildup, and adaptation of the bones, which may contribute to arthritis and nerve "entrapment" leading to numbness and pain extending into the arms.<sup>14</sup>

When young people get in the habit of poor posture, as the bones grow, they take on incorrect shapes.<sup>14</sup> Take a few minutes to watch this excellent video about what happens to your body when you get in the habit of poor posture: <https://youtu.be/t75TcDVn5EQ><sup>18</sup>

Even depression, can be a factor in postural stress as a person may tend to slump or put little energy into holding their head and body upright.

In data collected at one company's facilities throughout the United States over the past 17 years, there has been a dramatic increase in reported neck pain, as well as pain in the upper back, lower back, and right shoulder. The data from 1999-2003 and the data from 2011-2015 are displayed below



We also looked at data for office evaluations to see if there was an increasing number of people with office setup problems that might lead to this dramatic increase in upper body pain. Office workstation problems did not change much from year to year. So there is something in the past few years that is causing poor posture and is resulting in increases in neck and upper body pain. Laptop computers were expected to result in an increase in various postural problems and pains, but in the past 5 years, it is handheld devices including cell phones, smart phones, and tablet computers that have really become a prevalent part of most people's lives. These devices are a prime suspect in this large increase in upper body symptoms, especially the neck, though there is no way to directly correlate this.



Illustration courtesy of Reference 16

*Mechanical/Structural factors.* 21% of respondents in the study mentioned above indicated that neck pain was the result of stiffness, disc problems, or prior injury, though only 6.5% described their neck pain as injury-related.<sup>10</sup> While stiffness can be caused by posture, it can also be caused by sitting in a draft or twisting the neck in an awkward motion such as during exercise or work resulting in muscle tightness.<sup>1</sup> Stiffness of this type is termed non-specific neck pain. It doesn't permanently damage the neck and the spasms usually subside in a few days as long as you keep moving the neck and rest the neck muscles.<sup>1</sup>

Injuries such as whiplash, slipped discs, bulging discs, and bone spurs on the cervical vertebrae are mechanical problems. Some may heal by themselves, but some may require treatment.<sup>1</sup>

*Predisposition or Lifestyle factors.* 12.7% of respondents in one study felt that their neck pain was primarily caused by a preexisting condition, genetic predisposition, or lifestyle behavior including too little exercise, overuse from sports or work, arthritis, age, or weight.<sup>10</sup>

*Stress/Emotional triggers.* 11.8% of the respondents in the research study recognized that emotional triggers were the cause of their symptoms, with stress being the most commonly identified issue.<sup>10</sup> Excess muscle tension can be a result of postural problems, but it can also result from stress, high work demands, and anxiety.<sup>19,20</sup> Many people subconsciously hold stress in their neck and shoulder muscles resulting in fatigue and pain.<sup>1,21</sup> People with anxiety don't just hold the stress in these areas, they fixate on the muscle tension so it becomes amplified in their mind and they become unable to think about anything else.<sup>19</sup>

*Fatigue or Insomnia.* 3.7% of respondents in the research study indicated that fatigue or insomnia were the primary cause of their neck pain.<sup>10</sup>

*Wear and tear.* Cervical spondylosis is the medical term that refers to changes in the neck that occur as a result of everyday use and wear to the discs and facet joints of the neck.<sup>1,15</sup> The discs become thinner, causing the spaces between the vertebrae to narrow. Spurs of bone known as osteophytes, form at the edges of the vertebrae and the facet joints.<sup>1,15</sup> These changes are present in almost everyone by the age of 65.<sup>1</sup> Many people have no neck pain even though x-rays reveal significant changes in the neck.<sup>1</sup> Pain can occur when the facets rub or grind together, or osteophytes pinch the nerve roots that sprout between the vertebrae.<sup>1,15</sup> Pain may occur from the linings of worn joints or from stretched ligaments.<sup>1</sup> If the vertebral artery is pinched, this reduces the blood supply to the area of the brain that controls balance, leading to dizziness.<sup>1</sup> In very rare cases, the spinal cord may be squeezed causing weakness and numbness in the arms and legs.<sup>1</sup>

## **Prevention**

### *Postural and stress pain.*

- Notice your posture throughout the day and be mindful to keep your head upright.<sup>22</sup> It is easier to do this if you keep your back supported by sitting all the way back in the chair. Watch this video online for more information about posture at work. <https://youtu.be/9VXUJjrfoGY>
- Adjust the computer monitor so the top of the screen is at eye level (or below, if you wear bifocals). If the screen is at the correct height, your neck doesn't have to support your head in an unbalanced position, looking up or down.<sup>2,4</sup>
- Keep your mouse close to the side of the keyboard so you don't have to reach out to the side. Continuous reaching to the side requires constant contraction of the trapezius muscle, one of the primary sources of neck pain.<sup>9</sup>
- Avoid tucking the phone between your ear and shoulder when you talk.<sup>4</sup> Use a headset when using the telephone, while typing or taking notes or walking around the house.<sup>2,4</sup> Watch this short video to see the impact of cradling the phone or cellphone on your shoulder: <https://youtu.be/a7sLgHRdlsU>.<sup>23</sup>

- When reading or typing from documents at your desk, place them in a holder at eye level.<sup>2</sup> If you read at your desk, keep materials on a slanted surface to keep your neck aligned and your head upright.<sup>22</sup> If you read in bed, be sure your head is supported and you're not leaning forward.<sup>22</sup> Refer to our web page with recommendations for document holders and slant boards <http://working-well.org/Website/pdochldr.html> and for handheld device holders <http://working-well.org/Website/plaptop.html#tablets>
- Rethink your arrangements for crafts and hobbies to improve your posture and support your neck muscles.<sup>21</sup> Keep what you are working with as close to you as possible and at a height that doesn't require looking down for hours.<sup>9</sup>
- Take frequent breaks if you drive long distances or work long hours at your computer.<sup>4,22</sup> Stretch during these breaks; shrug your shoulders up and down, pull your shoulder blades together and then relax, and pull your shoulders down while leaning your head to each side to stretch your neck muscles.<sup>4</sup> See the *Attachment 1* below for stretches and links to YouTube stretch videos.
- Use relaxation techniques on a regular basis to prevent stress and tension in the neck muscles.<sup>2,3,21,22</sup> Learn to relax the neck muscles and control breathing. Often we don't realize that we are holding tension until we stop and practice these techniques, so tension mounts until our muscles are in knots or in spasms. Using audio recordings can help you let go of everyday stress while you focus on relaxation and breathing. See Resources below for some suggested recordings. Done regularly, meditation, guided imagery, or progressive muscle relaxation can help your body let go of physical and emotional tension.<sup>21</sup> Repeating a mantra can be very relaxing,<sup>24</sup> This can be any phrase or set of sounds, those used in religious practices from many different cultures.<sup>24</sup> Listen to calming music on a regular basis.<sup>24</sup> Classical baroque music in a slow tempo and 4/4 time has been found to be relaxing for most people and actually improves retention of learned material.<sup>24</sup> Get in the habit of listening to calming music during your commute, at home, and in the office if it's not distracting to you or others around you.
- Improve your body awareness. The Alexander Technique is a highly recommended method for achieving better posture.<sup>1</sup> The Balance Center in Palo Alto ([www.balancecenter.com](http://www.balancecenter.com)) also teaches very effective classes in posture awareness.
- Take the recommended daily allowance of calcium, magnesium, zinc, and manganese to ensure proper functioning of working muscles.<sup>17,21</sup> 1,000 mg of calcium and 500 mg of magnesium is recommended.
- Regular exercise is recommended to maintain a fit and flexible body as well as to relieve stress.<sup>21,24</sup> Exercise can improve the general alignment of the body, improve breathing, and release muscle tension.<sup>21</sup>
- Stretching and strengthening exercises specifically for your neck can help prevent muscle fatigue and injury.<sup>1,2,3,15</sup> If you do these exercises every day, your neck will become stronger.<sup>1</sup> See *Attachment 1* for stretching and strengthening exercises. More exercises are available through Reference 12.
- Apply ice to your neck after physical activity if you tend to get neck pain from exercise.<sup>2</sup>
- Evaluate your sleeping conditions. Don't sleep on your stomach.<sup>21,22</sup> When you sleep on your stomach with your head turned to one side night after night, you strain the same muscles over and over.<sup>22</sup> Make sure your pillow is comfortably supporting your head and neck. Using a neck pillow or orthopedic pillow may help. A cervical neck pillow is good for people who sleep on their back, but when sleeping on your side, you need a pillow that is about as thick as the distance between your ear and your shoulder.<sup>9</sup> Many pillows are much too thick and cause the neck to be bent in an awkward position throughout the night. This is illustrated below along with a type of pillow that attempts to help back and side sleepers. It has gotten fairly good reviews from users. When traveling, invest in a neck pillow to support your head and neck in an upright position.<sup>22</sup> Sleeping in a car or plane in a slouched, cramped position often leads to neck pain.



Illustrations courtesy of Reference 15



- Avoid carrying heavy loads, especially when carried over one shoulder. This can strain your neck and upset the alignment of your spine. Use a backpack (and carry it on two shoulders!) or a rolling cart, or at least streamline your purse or shoulder bag so you carry only what you use on a daily basis.
- Use seat belts, properly adjusted car headrests, and bike helmets to prevent injuries to the neck.<sup>2</sup>

*Cervical spondylosis.* Many cases are not preventable.<sup>25</sup> Research has indicated that a large part of the normal wear and tear of the spine is genetically determined.<sup>1</sup> Preventing injury by using proper sports equipment and techniques may help prevent some degeneration.<sup>25</sup> By age 60, 70% of women and 85% of men show evidence of cervical spondylosis in x-rays.<sup>25</sup>

*Cervical herniated disc.* Many factors increase the risk for disc herniation including aging, however many lifestyle changes can help prevent cervical disc disease.<sup>11</sup> Use of tobacco, poor posture and body mechanics, weak neck muscles, and obesity contribute significantly to poor disc health.<sup>11</sup>

## Treatment

*Postural and stress pain.* The following treatments can help reduce pain from general neck stresses and strains.

- Alternating heat and cold is effective in treating muscle tightness.<sup>17</sup> Apply a frozen gel pack or ice wrapped in a towel to the painful area for up to 20 minutes.<sup>17</sup> Do not use heat alone if there is inflammation. Heat can increase swelling, causing more pain. Take a hot shower and let the water run on your neck, or use hot moist heat from wet towel compresses.<sup>15</sup> Moist heat can penetrate tight muscles as well as relieve mental stress and anxiety.<sup>19</sup> Dry heat, like a heating pad, can help, but it tends to dry out the tissues and doesn't penetrate as well.<sup>27</sup> Keep the heat on long enough to allow your skin to turn somewhat red and warm from increased circulation, but no longer than 20-30 minutes.<sup>15,27</sup>



Photo courtesy Brookstone/Amazon.com

- Remain active. General exercise like brisk walking or jogging can be helpful because it uses up energy and makes it harder for the muscles to remain tense.<sup>19</sup> Bed rest is not necessary. If you are given a neck-collar, try not to use it for more than a couple of days so you do not lose muscle strength.<sup>3</sup>
- Massage is one of the best ways to reduce neck pain.<sup>19</sup> Self massage can sometimes be very helpful, but a massage therapist can help you mentally release stress and tension while working out the spasms in muscles.<sup>19</sup> Deep tissue massage restores mobility by reducing tension and improving blood flow.<sup>1,21</sup> Try using aromatic oils or using liniments (such as Tiger Balm) which produce a feeling of warmth and reduce pain.<sup>1</sup> Trigger point massage focuses on specific locations where the neck and shoulder muscles have formed a contracted knot of muscle fibers.<sup>28</sup> Some massage therapists and chiropractors are familiar with trigger point therapy and may incorporate it into their treatments.
- Neck exercises (*Attachment 1*) will restore your range of motion, promote strength, break down localized stiffness, and facilitate recovery.<sup>1,3</sup> Exercises will relieve symptoms and strengthen neck and shoulder muscles.<sup>11</sup> Begin with daily gentle stretching, then progress to more advanced exercises.<sup>17</sup> Warm the muscles before exercising them with a heating pad, warm gel pack, or hot shower before exercising them.<sup>17</sup>
- Try using a neck pillow to maintain correct neck position while sleeping.<sup>1,15</sup> Train yourself to sleep on your back as much as possible with your neck supported with a cervical pillow.
- Pain relieving drugs, generally non-steroidal anti-inflammatories such as aspirin or ibuprofen, will help reduce inflammation and may reduce pain.<sup>3</sup> In some cases, a muscle relaxing drug or other painkiller may be prescribed if NSAIDs aren't working or are not tolerated well.<sup>3,11</sup> In the case of tension headaches and neck pain, drugs are often not effective.
- Alternative therapies may be used to help relieve tension, manage pain, and strengthen neck and back muscles.<sup>3,11,12,21,29,30</sup>
  - ❖ Physiotherapy
  - ❖ Massage
  - ❖ Yoga
  - ❖ Chiropractic care
  - ❖ Acupuncture/Accupressure
  - ❖ Posture retraining and intensive muscle training

In one study of 272 adults, both chiropractic manipulation and home exercises were more effective than medication for pain relief both during treatment and one year later.<sup>29</sup> Medication included prescription NSAIDs, acetaminophen, opioids, and muscle relaxants.<sup>31</sup> Some people who are used to an exercise habit may prefer home exercise while others may prefer a more hands-on approach, so satisfaction with the results may be dependent upon the individual.<sup>29</sup>

Posture and coordination training such as the Alexander technique and acupuncture have been shown to have long-term benefits in reducing neck pain.<sup>32</sup> Even just one session of either intervention helped.<sup>32</sup>

- Inflammation, muscle tension, and resulting pain can be reduced by using DMSO (dimethyl sulfoxide) topically.<sup>33, 34</sup> DMSO is a solvent made from wood pulp that penetrates the skin very quickly and heals inflamed tissues.<sup>35, 36</sup> 20 years of study and hundreds of lab and human studies have demonstrated that it is safe and effective for a variety of uses, but it is usually used for pain relief and has been shown in clinical trials to be extremely effective at eliminating tension headaches and reducing muscle contractions.<sup>34</sup> A 70% solution is recommended, available at most health food stores.<sup>34</sup> Side effects are a garlic odor on the breath after absorption and sometimes a temporary burning sensation on the skin.<sup>33</sup> The gel or solution should be applied once or twice a day until the pain is gone and it should be allowed to dry on the skin before dressing.<sup>33</sup>
- Trigger point needling is a more invasive option where a needle is inserted into a trigger point alone (dry-needle) or local anesthetic, saline, or corticosteroids are injected.<sup>37</sup> This technique is used by the

medical field to treat fibromyalgia, tension headaches, and myofascial pain syndrome where multiple trigger points are involved and to not respond to other treatments.<sup>37</sup>

- Botulinum toxin A injections have been tested in several studies with patients suffering from a variety of headaches types including tension headaches.<sup>38</sup> It was not found to be any more effective than a placebo in episodic migraines or tension headaches, so it is not advisable to consider this fairly extreme, invasive procedure.<sup>38</sup>

*Cervical spondylosis.* Symptoms of this degeneration, also termed cervical osteoarthritis, vary a lot. As mentioned earlier, some people exhibit significant degeneration in x-rays, but experience no pain. Symptoms may include neck pain, sometimes radiating to the arms or shoulders, progressive stiffness of the neck, popping or grinding in the neck, loss of sensation or abnormal sensations in the shoulders or arms, loss of balance, or headaches, especially in the back of the head.<sup>25</sup> Most people experience some chronic problems, but these do respond to treatment and do not require surgery.

Treatment involves relief of pain and prevention of permanent spinal cord and nerve root injury.<sup>25</sup> One or a combination of the following treatments may be helpful:

- Lifestyle modifications including weight management, healthy and nutritious eating habits, regular exercise, and not smoking are critical to maintaining spine health in general.<sup>39</sup>
- Physical therapy involving stretches and strengthening exercises.<sup>25,39</sup> Neck traction may be used by a therapist to relieve pressure in your neck.<sup>25</sup> Traction involves temporary stretching of the neck.
- Massage, acupuncture, and/or chiropractic or osteopathic manipulation.<sup>25,39,40</sup>
- Hot and cold packs help manage inflammation and muscle spasms.<sup>7,25</sup>
- Pain-relieving injections of corticosteroids can help reduce inflammation and pain by reducing muscle contraction.<sup>11</sup>

*Cervical herniated disc.* Most of the time, herniated discs can be treated with one or a combination of the following treatments. If you decide to use alternative treatments, it is best to seek the guidance of a Complimentary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) practitioner who can work with you and your doctor.<sup>41</sup>

- Anti-inflammatories to reduce pain and inflammation of the disc.<sup>11</sup>
- During the first couple of days, cold is best to reduce swelling, muscle spasms, and pain by reducing blood flow.<sup>11,27</sup> After 2 days, use heat to warm and relax tissues, increase blood flow, and flush away toxins that have built up during muscle spasms and disc injury.<sup>11</sup> Never apply ice or heat directly to the skin. Use a towel to wrap the heat or cold source and apply it for 15-20 minutes, but no longer.<sup>11,18</sup>
- Physical therapy and exercises.<sup>11,42</sup>
- Chiropractic or osteopathic manipulation to restore normal joint motion. Many different gentle low-force techniques can be employed.<sup>42,43</sup>
- Acupuncture, acupressure, and massage can bring relief to the damaged area.<sup>41</sup>
- Medications such as narcotic agents, muscle relaxants or NSAIDs may help reduce nerve pain and help restore normal sleep patterns.<sup>11</sup>

If the above treatments do not resolve the pain within 6 to 12 weeks or if the pain and disability is severe, spinal surgery is a final option. Less than 5% of all cases require surgery, but it is a last resort.<sup>11</sup> In most cases, symptoms improve after 4-6 weeks of non-surgical treatment.<sup>11</sup> If surgery is recommended, be sure to ask what the purpose of the operation is and what results are expected.<sup>11</sup> A second opinion from a different doctor is usually wise.<sup>11</sup>

**Revised 1/18/2016**

## RESOURCES:

- *Gentle Hands Technique*. Simple partner-massage techniques and exercises to release chronic neck and shoulder tension. [www.tensionheadaches.com/](http://www.tensionheadaches.com/)
- *Health Journeys*. Guided imagery and meditation for relaxation, stress relief, and pain relief among many other recordings. <http://www.healthjourneys.com/>
- Relaxing New Age Music Channel, YouTube.com. Many instrumental and nature sound recordings with visuals. <https://youtu.be/oIy4--nd5Gc>
- Harry S. Truman Memorial Veterans' Hospital. Five different guided visualization and relaxation recordings for breathing, muscle relaxation, and mindfulness meditation. [http://www.columbiamo.va.gov/services/Relaxation\\_Recordings.asp](http://www.columbiamo.va.gov/services/Relaxation_Recordings.asp)
- *Active Forever*. Neck pillows and other stretching, relaxation aids. <https://www.activeforever.com/>
- *The Comfort Channel*. Neck pillows. 1-800-303-7574. <http://www.comfortchannel.com/level.php?node=1075&title=neck-support-pillows-butterfly-pillows-chillow-cooling-pillows>
- *Amazon.com*. Hot/cold neck and shoulder wrap filled with flax seeds and herbs by Herbal Concepts. \$29.99 [http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00FKY9H96/ref=s9\\_hps\\_bw\\_g121\\_i2](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00FKY9H96/ref=s9_hps_bw_g121_i2)

### Attachment 1

**If you are currently experiencing neck pain with numbness in your chest, shoulder or arm, please do not attempt any of the techniques listed below. Contact your physician or health practitioner for an evaluation.**

#### Stretching exercises for the neck

The best stretching demonstrations are on YouTube.

- Ask Dr. Jo – Neck Pain Stretches: <https://youtu.be/2NOsE-VPpkE>
- Cassie Naumann - Side Neck stretches: <https://youtu.be/Hx96pziXH2o?list=PL72D16D8399C0098D>

Let your neck drop to one shoulder, stretch and hold it for several seconds as you focus on releasing the tight muscle, keeping your shoulder down and relaxed. Then rotate your head forward a bit, then backward a bit and notice where there it the most tension. Spend time releasing the tightest spots, but never force the stretch until it is painful. With your hand, apply a little pressure to your head to help bring it into the same direction. Gently pull until you feel a nice stretch and hold it for several seconds as you focus on releasing the tight muscle, keeping your shoulder down and relaxed.

When you are finished, you can use your hand to help bring your head upright again. Then bend your neck to the other shoulder and repeat the stretch on this side.<sup>15</sup>



With your shoulders relaxed, turn your head to the side as if you are looking over your shoulder. Turn until you feel a stretch and hold it for 6 seconds. Turn to the other side and do the same thing. Repeat the sequence 3 times.<sup>15</sup>



### Strengthening exercises for the neck

Gently tense your neck muscles for a few seconds in each position. If you do this every day, the neck movements will increase your muscle strength.<sup>6</sup>

Excellent exercises to strengthen the neck and upper back are on YouTube:

- Dr. Alan Mandell – *3 Exercises Done at the Same Time to Correct Forward Head Carriage & Rounded Shoulders*. <https://youtu.be/IbbMd1bTOR4>
- Dr. Alan Mandell – *3 Part Exercise to REMOVE Tight Trapezius Muscle in Neck (Neck Pain & Pinched Nerve)*. <https://youtu.be/vmONf10oeF4>

<p>Place one hand on the side of your head and hold it there. Press your head into your hand, trying to bend it to the side, but don't let your head move. Hold that contraction for 10 seconds. Do this three times and repeat with the opposite side.<sup>15</sup></p>	
<p>Place both of your hands on your forehead. Push your head into your hands, not letting your head move and hold the contraction for 10 seconds. Do this three times on each side.<sup>15</sup></p>	
<p>Place one hand onto the side of your head and hold it there. Turn your head into your hand as if you were going to look over your shoulder, only don't let your head move. Hold this contraction for 10 seconds. Do this three times on each side.<sup>15</sup></p>	
<p>Stand with your back flat against a wall. Tuck your chin and press your head into the wall. Hold for 10 seconds and relax. Repeat this three times.<sup>15</sup></p>	

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