

HOLISTIC WAYS TO NECK PAIN RELIEF



**Learn Natural Healthy Methods of
Overcoming and Relieving Yourself of
all forms of Neck Pain Issues, So to
Maintain a Good Body Posture**

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Table of Contents

[GUIDE TO NECK PAIN RELIEF INTRODUCTION](#)

[Causes of neck pain](#)

[How neck pain is treated](#)

[How to Ease Neck Pain at Home](#)

[What I Need to Know About Neck Anatomy](#)

[What Are Common Neck Pain Causes?](#)

[Types of Neck Pain](#)

[What Are Neck Pain Symptoms?](#)

[How Can You Get a Neck Pain Diagnosis?](#)

[What makes the pain less or greater?](#)

[What Are the Most Common Nonsurgical Treatments for Neck Pain?](#)

[Will I Need Surgery for Neck Pain?](#)

[What Kinds of Surgery Are Used For Neck Pain?](#)

[Preventing and Living with Neck Pain](#)

[Already dealing with neck pain?](#)

[What to know about a stiff neck](#)

[Causes of a stiff neck](#)

[Treatments for a stiff neck](#)

[Prevention](#)

[Self Care for Neck and Back Pain](#)

[CONCLUSION](#)

GUIDE TO NECK PAIN RELIEF INTRODUCTION

Your neck is made up of vertebrae that extend from the skull to the upper torso. Cervical discs absorb shock between the bones.

The bones, ligaments, and muscles of your neck support your head and allow for motion. Any abnormalities, inflammation, or injury can cause neck pain or stiffness.

Many people experience neck pain or stiffness occasionally. In many cases, it's due to poor posture or overuse. Sometimes, neck pain is caused by injury from a fall, contact sports, or whiplash.

Most of the time, neck pain isn't a serious condition and can be relieved within a few days.

But in some cases, neck pain can indicate serious injury or illness and require a doctor's care.

If you have neck pain that continues for more than a week, is severe, or is accompanied by other symptoms, seek medical attention immediately.

Causes of neck pain

Neck pain or stiffness can happen for a variety of reasons.

Muscle tension and strain

This is usually due to activities and behaviors such as:

- poor posture
- working at a desk for too long without changing position
- sleeping with your neck in a bad position
- jerking your neck during exercise

Injury

The neck is particularly vulnerable to injury, especially in falls, car accidents, and sports, where the muscles and ligaments of the neck are forced to move outside of their normal range.

If the neck bones (cervical vertebrae) are fractured, the spinal cord may also be damaged. Neck injury due to sudden jerking of the head is commonly called whiplash.

Heart attack

Neck pain can also be a symptom of a heart attack, but it often presents with other symptoms of a heart attack, such as:

- shortness of breath
- sweating
- nausea

- vomiting
- arm or jaw pain

If your neck hurts and you have other symptoms of heart attack, call an ambulance or go to the emergency room immediately.

Meningitis

Meningitis is an inflammation of the thin tissue that surrounds the brain and spinal cord. In people who have meningitis, a fever and a headache often occur with a stiff neck. Meningitis can be fatal and is a medical emergency.

If you have the symptoms of meningitis, seek help immediately.

Other causes

Other causes include the following:

Rheumatoid arthritis causes pain, swelling of the joints, and bone spurs. When these occur in the neck area, neck pain can result.

Osteoporosis weakens bones and can lead to small fractures. This condition often happens in hands or knees, but it can also occur in the neck.

Fibromyalgia is a condition that causes muscle pain throughout the body, especially in the neck and shoulder region.

As you age, the cervical discs can degenerate. This is known as spondylosis, or osteoarthritis of the neck. This can narrow the space between the vertebrae. It also adds stress to your joints.

When a disk protrudes, as from a trauma or injury, it may add pressure on the spinal cord or nerve roots. This is called a herniated cervical disk, also known as a ruptured or slipped disk.

Spinal stenosis occurs when the spinal column narrows and causes pressure on the spinal cord or the nerve roots as it exits the vertebrae. This can be due to long-term inflammation caused by arthritis or other conditions.

In rare instances, neck stiffness or pain occurs due to:

- congenital abnormalities
- infections
- abscesses
- tumors
- cancer of the spine

When to see your doctor

If symptoms persist for more than a week, consult with your doctor.

You should also see a doctor if you have:

- severe neck pain without apparent cause
- lump in your neck
- fever
- headache
- swollen glands
- nausea
- vomiting
- trouble swallowing or breathing
- weakness
- numbness
- tingling

- pain that radiates down your arms or legs
- inability to move your arms or hands
- inability to touch your chin to your chest
- bladder or bowel dysfunction

If you've been in an accident or fall and your neck hurts, seek medical care immediately.

How neck pain is treated

Your doctor will perform a physical exam and take your complete medical history. Be prepared to tell your doctor about the specifics of your symptoms. You should also let them know about all prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medications and supplements you've been taking.

Even if it doesn't seem related, you should also let your doctor know about any recent injuries or accidents you've had.

Treatment for neck pain depends on the diagnosis. In addition to a thorough history and physical exam by your doctor, you may also need one or more of the following imaging studies and tests to help your doctor determine the cause of your neck pain:

- blood tests

- X-rays
- CT scans
- MRI scans

electromyography, which allows your doctor to check the health of your muscles and the nerves that control your muscles lumbar puncture (spinal tap)

Depending on the results, your doctor may refer you to a specialist.

Treatment for neck pain may include:

- ice and heat therapy
- exercise, stretching, and physical therapy
- pain medication
- corticosteroid injections
- muscle relaxants
- neck collar
- traction
- antibiotics if you have an infection
- hospital treatment if a condition such as meningitis or heart attack is the cause
- surgery, which is rarely necessary

Alternative therapies include:

- acupuncture
- chiropractic treatment
- massage
- transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS)

Make sure you're seeing a licensed professional when using these methods.

How to Ease Neck Pain at Home

If you have minor neck pain or stiffness, take these simple steps to relieve it:

Apply ice for the first few days. After that, apply heat with a heating pad, hot compress, or by taking a hot shower.

Take OTC pain relievers, such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen.

Take a few days off from sports, activities that aggravate your symptoms, and heavy lifting. When you resume normal activity, do so slowly as your symptoms ease.

Exercise your neck every day. Slowly stretch your head in side-to-side and up-and-down motions.

Use good posture.

Avoid cradling the phone between your neck and shoulder.

Change your position often. Don't stand or sit in one position for too long.

Get a gentle neck massage.

Use a special neck pillow for sleeping.

Don't use a neck brace or collar without your doctor's approval. If you don't use them properly, they can make your symptoms worse.

mpact on a person's mental health; up to 85 percent of patients with chronic pain are affected by severe depression.

What I Need to Know About Neck Anatomy

You don't need to memorize the physiology and anatomy of your neck to improve its function and reduce pain, but it's helpful to have a general understanding of your cervical spine.

Neck mobility is matchless. Although you won't get any Exorcist-style head spinning, it is capable of moving the head in many directions: 90° of flexion (forward motion), 90° of extension (backward motion), 180° of rotation (side to side), and almost 120° of tilt to either shoulder.

But all that mobility comes at the cost of complexity. First you've got your seven vertebrae (C1 through C7), each cushioned by an intervertebral disc and connected by facet joints. There are also 32 muscles, plus the tendons that attach them to bones, that help move and stabilize the neck, as well as a number of ligaments attaching bones to each other. That's a lot of action in a comparatively small area.

What Are Common Neck Pain Causes?

Neck pain tends to peak in middle age, and is slightly more common in women and in patients with a family history of neck pain. Smokers,

patients with psychological diagnoses such as depression and anxiety, and patients with a sedentary lifestyle are also more at risk.

Neck pain is most common in people over the age of 50. But beyond good old aging, the causes of neck pain are as varied as the list is long. Speaking of – here's a list of some of the more common causes of neck pain:

Injury and Accidents:

Whiplash is a common neck injury sustained when the head is forced to move backward and/or forward beyond the normal range of motion. The unnatural and rapid movement of the neck affects the muscles and ligaments, which tighten and contract. This creates muscle fatigue resulting in pain and stiffness. Whiplash is most commonly sustained due to a car accident, but can also result from traumas such as a fall or a sports accident.

Nerve Compression: When a [cervical] nerve becomes compressed, it can cause [radiating]pain that moves up into the head, behind the eyes, into the jaw, down the arms. Herniated discs are the most common cause of nerve compression and spinal stenosis (crowding of the spinal canal), but bone spurs can also compress nerves.

Health Conditions:

Osteoarthritis: Called spondylosis when it's in spinal facet joints—is the most common form of arthritis. It's caused by wear and tear and aging, and can create osteophytes (bone spurs) that crowd the spinal canal and compress nerve roots in the neck.

Other Forms of Arthritis: Many types of arthritis, particularly the inflammatory forms like rheumatoid arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis, psoriatic arthritis, and juvenile idiopathic arthritis, can affect the cervical spine. Chronic inflammation in the neck causes damage of the joints that allow movement in the neck.

Other Disease Processes: Although neck pain is most commonly caused by strain, prolonged pain and/or neurologic deficit may be an indication of something more serious. These symptoms should not be ignored. Spinal infection, spinal cord compression, tumor, fracture, and other disorders can occur. If you have sustained a head injury, your neck has likely been affected, too. Seek medical attention promptly.

Lifestyle Issues:

Extra weight: Extra pounds put undue stress on the spine and weak abdominal muscles can fail to support it, both of which may disrupt

the spine's balance and cause the neck to bend forward to compensate.

Stress: If you're stressed—and who isn't? —you may be clenching the muscles that move your neck without realizing it, potentially leading to a stiff, sore neck.

Poor Posture: Prolonged poor posture—looking at you, excessive smartphone usage—can lead to neck pain. Clenched teeth, improper lifting, prolonged periods of sitting at the computer, and reading in bed may lead to neck pain.

Types of Neck Pain

The most common types of neck pain.

There are different neck pain profiles. Some people experience only one type, while others experience a combination.

Neuropathic neck pain: Stemming from the nerves or nerve roots in the cervical spine, neuropathic neck pain could result from conditions such as a herniated disc that presses against a nearby nerve, or other causes of nerve compression.

Mechanical neck pain: This pain stems from the spine and its supporting structures (e.g., muscles, ligaments, bones, or cartilage).

Typically, mechanical pain is caused by poor posture, neck strain caused by work or sporting/physical activities, and even stress.

Central neuropathic pain: Most commonly a result of a stroke, spinal cord injury, or multiple sclerosis. It may also be a result of injury to the central nervous system, caused by traumatic injury to the brain/spinal cord or infection (e.g., abscess, encephalitis, myelitis)

What Are Neck Pain Symptoms?

Other than neck pain itself, you may notice other symptoms that accompany the pain. Some of the more common symptoms of neck pain include:

Neck muscle stiffness: Tight muscles in the back of the head or a “muscle knot” in the neck. This may spread to your shoulders, upper back and arms.

Headache: Experiencing headaches in the occipital region (back of the scalp) is very common but can also extend to the top of the head, causing "tension" headaches from muscle tightness.

Pain and/or weakness that shoots down the arm: This may be caused by muscle fatigue or nerve compression. Very often along specific nerve roots (i.e., vertebrae C6, which extends to the thumb

and index finger and vertebrae C5, which extends to the deltoids and bicep).

Loss of neck mobility: Inability to turn your head and neck easily.

Paraesthesias: A sensation of numbness and/or tingling in the arms, most often caused by nerve compression at the level of the spine, or as the branching nerves pass through tight, inflamed muscles.

If your neck pain is caused by nerve compression, you may experience the following symptoms:

Weakness in the shoulder, arm or hand

A feeling of numbness or “pins and needles” in arm, fingers or hand

Sharp, burning pain near the pinched nerve that radiates outward

Some conditions, such as coronary artery disease (angina) or even lung tumors may mimic these conditions. It is best to have a skilled physician perform a thorough physical examination when the symptoms described are present.

Daily life (and night life) can take its toll on your neck. You may have slept wrong last night, causing your neck muscles to tighten.

How Can You Get a Neck Pain Diagnosis?

Neck pain is most often diagnosed by a primary care provider. The most important aspect of treatment is to try to identify the underlying cause of the pain, as this will direct the treatment.

For example, if the cause is due to a muscle imbalance or poor ergonomics (e.g. while working from home at a makeshift desk!), it is important to address these underlying issues when thinking through the overall treatment plan.

To assess your neck pain, your healthcare provider will:

Ask for your medical history

Ask questions to determine the source of your pain, including:

When did the pain start?

What activities preceded the pain?

What have you tried to relieve the neck pain?

Does the pain radiate or travel into other body parts?

What makes the pain less or greater?

Perform a physical exam to determine whether your pain is related to muscle, joint or ligaments. This exam will include:

Observation of your posture

Palpating/feeling the curvature of your spine, vertebral alignment and muscle spasms

An assessment of your neck mobility, including the strength and sensation felt in your neck and arms

Diagnostic testing: to rule out certain conditions (e.g., infection, fracture or tumor).

Your doctor visit may include a neurological examination that tests your reflexes, muscle strength, sensory and/or motor challenges, and pain distribution in order to help them make the correct diagnosis.

This exam is most often performed if you are experiencing numbness or tingling in your shoulder, arms or neck, or if you have focal weakness that indicates nerve damage. Your doctor may also order a nerve conduction study (also known as electromyography/EMG) to check how quickly your nerves send and receive signals to and from your brain. Slower speeds in the nerve conduction study could indicate nerve damage.

Imaging studies can help your doctor narrow down the cause of neck pain. An X-ray can reveal narrowing of disc space, fracture, osteophyte formation, and osteoarthritis. An X-ray won't show soft

tissue like muscles, ligaments or intervertebral discs, though; you'll need an MRI or CT scan for that.

What Are the Most Common Nonsurgical Treatments for Neck Pain?

If you are experiencing chronic pain (2+ weeks), it is important to seek medical attention for further evaluation and treatment. Treatments for neck pain vary, depending on the cause and duration of the neck pain you are experiencing. Many neck pain patients find relief in using one or a combination of these therapies. The most common treatments include:

Medications: Both over-the-counter and prescription medications may help manage neck pain, reduce inflammation, and decrease muscle spasm and sleep disturbance. The first line of treatment when it comes to neck pain medication is typically non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDS), such as ibuprofen and naproxen, and acetaminophen (Tylenol). Some NSAIDS can be applied topically to the skin, such as Voltaren Gel and Aspercreme; other topical treatments include Icy-Hot, lidocaine based patches, and CBD creams/ointments.

Prescription medications such as muscle relaxers and nerve pain medications are sometimes considered. Muscle relaxants are used more often for acute pain rather than chronic pain.

If you're using medicines to treat neck pain, remember to take all medications as prescribed by your doctor and report any side effects. Some pain medications — such as opioids — are highly addictive and should be used only as prescribed. If you are experiencing neck pain of a degenerative origin, no medicine will 'cure' the pain, but it will help with pain control. For more information, you can read our article just on medications to relieve neck pain.

Interventions: Interventions such as injections of pain-relieving medicine into the affected joints or nerves are sometimes an option for relieving neck pain. Depending on the cause of neck pain, injections such as trigger point injections, epidural steroid injections, and radiofrequency ablations can be performed. Botox injections are sometimes given at the site of pain, or dry needling into tight bands of muscle, though studies show mixed results of its effectiveness.

For those with neuropathic neck pain, injections including a steroid and pain reliever may be effective, especially if done in conjunction

with physical therapy. Ablation (burning) of the nerves near the neck joints may improve mobility and reduce pain, too.

Neck pain injections

Steroid injections may help neck pain.

For those who do not want (or should not have) corticosteroids or ablation procedures to the neck but still seek an option for pain relief, regenerative treatments such as platelet rich plasma (PRP) and/or stem cells from bone marrow aspirate concentrate (BMAC) may be appropriate.

All of the other traditional injections, ablations, and surgeries are destructive. For the first time we have a treatment that is reversing the process—not covering it up—and is thereby constructive. It is widely held that these treatments need more research before they can be considered standard, and most insurances will not cover them.

Cervical collar and/or cervical pillow: If you've sustained a neck injury, a cervical collar is used to provide support and limit motion while you are healing. It also helps keep your cervical spine in proper alignment. Cervical pillows are designed to place the right amount of curvature in your neck during sleep. They help decrease pressure on

the nerves in your neck to help you sleep better — much needed when living with pain!

Complementary therapies: Alternative treatments may be helpful in managing neck pain. Some of the more popular complementary therapies for treating neck pain include:

Acupuncture: Acupuncture practitioners work to restore a healthy flow of your “qi” — your body’s energy force. Some people find relief after one acupuncture treatment, though others require a few sessions to feel less neck pain.

Herbal remedies: Topical herbal remedies such as capsaicin cream can temporarily reduce pain when applied to the skin. Devil’s claw and/or white willow bark are both commonly used to reduce inflammation and pain.

Massage: Whether your neck pain is caused by stress, injury or misuse, a massage can help release muscle tension and reduce pain and inflammation. Regular massages may also be an effective neck pain prevention measure.

Yoga and pilates: These exercises can increase your core strength, improve balance and posture and reduce stress — all fantastic ways to help you prevent and/or reduce neck pain. If your pain is caused

by tense muscles or weak core muscles, yoga and pilates can be particularly helpful.

Chiropractic care: A chiropractor may help reduce your neck pain through the use of chiropractic neck adjustments, called cervical manipulation. These adjustments loosen up the joints of the cervical vertebrae in the neck to help reduce the pain caused by muscle spasms and pinched nerves. Your chiropractor may employ several techniques to reduce joint restrictions or misalignments in order to reduce inflammation, improve function and eliminate neck pain.

Physical therapy: Most physical therapy treatments for neck pain involve an exercise program that will strengthen and stretch the neck to reduce pain and stiffness. Research shows that physical therapy is often a better treatment for neck pain than surgery or pain medication. Your physical therapist will work with you on exercises and treatments you can do at home to help you return to your normal activities and lifestyle.

Will I Need Surgery for Neck Pain?

Most patients with neck pain respond well to non-surgical treatments, so cervical spine surgery is seldom needed to treat it. In fact, less than 5% of neck pain patients need surgery.

Surgery is typically a last resort, unless it's an acute disc herniation compression on the spinal cord where it's a neurosurgical emergency, such as when someone experiences loss of bowel or bladder control, or extreme weakness in the limbs where decompression of the cord is imperative.

You may need cervical spine surgery if:

Non-surgical treatment is not helping. That is, you've tried a combination of medication, chiropractic care, physical therapy, massage, exercises, and more, and you're still in pain.

Your pain is worsening. A pinched nerve in your neck — called cervical radiculopathy — can lead to pain, numbness, and weakness in your shoulders or down your arms. If your pain is worsening, surgery can remove the source of pressure on your nerves (often caused by a herniated disc).

Your spinal cord is being compressed. Certain neck conditions can put pressure on your spinal cord. You may experience pain or stiffness, problems with balance, or have difficulties with fine motor skills.

You experience progressive neurological symptoms. If you are feeling numbness, tingling and weakness in your arms and legs and/

or are having trouble with balance or walking.

Generally, surgery is done for degenerative disc disease, trauma, or spinal instability. These conditions may put pressure on your spinal cord or on the nerves coming from the spine, and surgery is the only option for relief.

What Kinds of Surgery Are Used For Neck Pain?

There are two common types of cervical spine surgeries performed to relieve neck pain:

Decompression: removing the tissue that is pressing against a nerve structure

Stabilization: limiting the motion between vertebrae. Spinal fusion (including cervical spinal fusion), involves the surgeon using plates, screws, bones and other materials to limit motion between the vertebrae in order to stabilize the spine.

There are different types of decompression procedures, including:

Discectomy: the surgeon removes all or part of a damaged disc

Anterior cervical discectomy and fusion (ACDF): Often thought of as the “gold standard” in cervical spine surgery, ACDF involves removing a damaged disc to relieve nerve root or spinal cord pressure. Your surgeon will insert a graft to fuse together the bones above and below the disc.

Cervical disc replacement: Also known as artificial disc replacement or total disc arthroplasty, this procedure involves removing the damaged cervical disc — along with any bone spurs — and replacing it with a metal or polymer prosthetic.

Corpectomy: the vertebral body is removed to access whatever is compressing the spinal cord or nerve.

Transcorporeal Microdecompression (TCMD): the surgeon accesses the cervical spine from the front of the neck. TCMD is performed through a small channel made in the vertebral body to access and decompress the spinal cord and nerve. This restores normal spacing in the spinal cord while preserving the disc.

Foraminotomy: removes bone spurs that are pressing on a nerve
Your surgeon will work with you to determine what's best for your condition.

Stabilization surgery is sometimes—but not always—done at the same time as a decompression surgery. In some forms of decompression surgery, the surgeon may need to remove a large portion of the vertebra or vertebrae. That results in an unstable spine, meaning that it moves in abnormal ways, which puts you more at risk for serious neurological injury. In that case, the surgeon will restabilize the spine. This is typically done with a spinal fusion or implantation of an artificial disc.

Some patients are at high-risk for poor bone healing or unsuccessful fusion. Smoking and diabetes are two of several risk factors that impede bone healing and fusion. A bone growth stimulator may be recommended and prescribed for patients with certain risk factors.

Preventing and Living with Neck Pain

While avoiding neck pain isn't always possible, you can keep your neck muscles strain- and stress-free by creating healthy habits. Instead of in front of a computer all day, for example, take stretch breaks throughout the day.

If your neck pain feels worse at the end of each day, consider your posture. Are you sitting up straight? Sitting in your chair with your feet flat on the floor?

If your neck pain feels worse in the morning, check your sleep position and pillow. Use a pillow that supports your neck and keeps it straight. Avoid sleeping on your stomach with your neck twisted, if possible.

What if you go to sleep feeling fine and wake up with neck pain? Daily life (and nightlife, even if it's just spent on your pillow!) can take its toll on your neck. If you wake up with neck pain, the best thing to do is give your body time to heal on its own. To get through the day without letting the pain interfere with your normal activities, you have a few options.

Gently stretch your neck: the Spine Universe Exercise Center offers a video with 3 neck stretches and exercises to help relieve a stiff neck.

Take over-the-counter pain medications, such as Tylenol or Advil.

Alternate between heat and ice treatments on your neck: 20 minutes of heat followed by 20 minutes of ice should help relieve the pain and expedite the healing process.

Rest: take a few days off from any strenuous activities that aggravate your symptoms, such as sports and heavy lifting.

Already dealing with neck pain?

While there are many options for relieving neck pain, there is currently no treatment that has been scientifically proven to cure chronic neck pain. Even common treatments have conflicting evidence around their effectiveness at eliminating pain and increasing neck function.

Sometimes, people must learn to manage their pain on a daily basis through lifestyle changes and self-management.

Here are a few strategies to help reduce chronic neck pain and improve your quality of life:

Stay active every day: stretch and walk and do light exercises that don't make your pain worse

Pace yourself: don't feel like you have to 'do it all'. Allow time to rest throughout the day each day.

Advocate for yourself: learn how to communicate how you're feeling with your care providers and friends and family. Set limits on what you can and cannot do and allow people in your life to support you.

Get plenty of sleep: being well-rested can help you cope better with your pain.

What to know about a stiff neck

The neck contains muscles, tendons, ligaments, and bones. These work together to support the head and allow it to move in many directions. The neck may become stiff or painful when overused or injured.

A stiff neck often occurs when one of the muscles becomes strained or tense. Stiffness can also develop if one or more of the vertebrae is injured.

A stiff neck may become painful when a person tries to move their neck or head.

Usually, a stiff neck results from a minor injury or incident. People can often relieve the stiffness at home. In rare cases, however, it can be a sign of a serious illness that requires medical treatment.

Causes of a stiff neck

Stiffness usually occurs when the neck muscles are overused, stretched too far, or strained. This can cause pain ranging from mild to severe that can make it difficult to move the head or use the neck muscles.

The most common causes of a stiff neck include:

Minor sprains and strains

Sleeping in an awkward position can cause a stiff neck.

A stiff neck often results from minor injury or strain, possibly due to:

- sleeping awkwardly
- sitting or slouching for long periods, such as at a desk
- looking down at an object (such as a cell phone) repeatedly
- sustaining a sports injury
- experiencing a fall
- having tense muscles due to stress

Whiplash

More severe neck injuries can cause whiplash. People often experience whiplash during car accidents that cause the head to suddenly jerk forward and backward.

Whiplash is an injury to the muscles, bones, ligaments, nerves in the neck, or all of these. It causes pain and stiffness in the neck.

Other symptoms of whiplash include:

- a headache
- dizziness
- back or shoulder pain

- a feeling of prickling or burning in the neck area
- memory loss or trouble concentrating

Arthritis

Cervical spondylosis, or arthritis of the neck, can also cause neck pain and stiffness, which may improve when lying down.

The pain may get worse when a person stays in the same position for a long period, such as while driving or sitting in front of a computer. Other symptoms of cervical spondylosis include:

- headaches
- numbness in the arms or hands
- trouble walking, balance problems, or both
- weakness in the arms or legs

A doctor may diagnose cervical spondylosis with the help of certain tests, such as an X-ray, MRI scan, and a blood test.

Meningitis

Sometimes, a stiff neck is a symptom of meningitis, which can be serious. Meningitis is an inflammation of the meninges, which are

coverings on the brain and spinal cord.

A virus, bacteria, or fungi may cause meningitis. Viral meningitis can get better on its own, but bacterial and fungal meningitis can be life-threatening. Some symptoms of meningitis include:

- a sudden fever, usually with a headache, a stiff neck, or both
- nausea
- vomiting
- sensitivity to light
- confusion, irritability, or both
- an inability to wake from sleep

A person should seek immediate medical care if these symptoms appear.

Treatments for a stiff neck

The best way to relieve a stiff neck depends on the cause. When the stiffness is minor, some of the following home treatments may help:

Applying ice

Applying an ice pack may help reduce swelling and numb pain.

Using an ice pack can help relieve inflammation and swelling after a minor strain. The ice can have a numbing effect, temporarily relieving any pain.

This treatment is usually most effective within the first 48 hours of an injury, when there tends to be the most significant swelling.

Use a first aid ice pack or cover a bag of ice or frozen peas with a cloth to avoid frostbite. Apply the ice for up to 20 minutes at a time, taking 20–30-minute breaks.

Applying heat

Some people alternate using ice and heat on a muscle strain. Using heating pads or a taking hot bath can help relax tense muscles and provide relief.

Taking over-the-counter medicines

If applying ice, heat, or both does not relieve the pain of a stiff neck, taking nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) may help.

Some examples include ibuprofen and naproxen, which can reduce swelling and relieve pain. If a person has a health condition and is taking other medications, they should ask a doctor before using NSAIDs.

Stretching

Stretch the neck muscles by gently and slowly moving the head from side to side. Roll the shoulders forward and backward. Stop if the stretches cause pain.

Checking the sleep environment

Sometimes, a mattress that is too firm or not supportive enough can cause neck pain. A pillow that is the incorrect size or firmness may also cause a stiff neck.

The head, neck, and back should be in an aligned position during sleep. The pillows that a person uses should suit their sleeping position.

A firmer, larger pillow may work well for side sleepers. Back sleepers may need a flatter pillow that supports the head and neck without forcing them into a forward position.

Paying attention to posture

Slouching can gradually pull the neck muscles and cause stiffness and pain. A person should focus on keeping the shoulders, neck, and back in a straight line throughout the day. Wearing a posture-correcting device may help, as can setting reminders and alarms on a cell phone or computer.

See a dentist

Ongoing stiffness in the neck accompanied by a headache or jaw pain upon waking can be a sign of nighttime teeth grinding, or bruxism. A dentist can check the teeth for signs of wear from grinding, and they may look at the alignment of the jaw.

Some people wear a custom-made teeth guard at night to protect the teeth from further damage. This may also alleviate pressure on the jaw and neck muscles.

Getting a massage

A licensed massage therapist may help provide relief from tense, sore muscles. Although research has not yet proven that massage is effective, a study from 2014 found that massage did improve pain for people with neck arthritis.

Other research published in the journal *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice* found that having a professional massage can help relieve stress, which may indirectly help with stiffness in the neck.

Managing stress

There is no way to completely avoid stress. However, learning to manage it can reduce tension in the neck.

People with high levels of chronic stress may wish to talk with a healthcare professional about healthful ways to manage stress.

Prevention

Looking down at a phone for too long can cause eye and neck strain.

Some of the following measures can help prevent a stiff neck:

Use an earpiece to talk on the phone. Avoid holding the phone between the shoulder and ear.

Try not to look down at a cell phone or tablet for long periods. Hold the device at eye level whenever possible and take frequent breaks.

Use proper ergonomics at work. This may include keeping the screen at eye level, keeping the feet flat on the floor, and making sure the arms are supported. Also, focus on keeping the head directly above the neck without craning it forward.

Be mindful when carrying bags. Carrying a heavy purse or briefcase can put pressure on the shoulder and strain the muscles in the neck. Use rolling bags or backpacks whenever possible.

Take breaks. Sitting or driving for long periods can strain the neck. Get up, walk, and stretch at least once per hour.

Invest in a high-quality mattress and pillow that provide the correct amount of support.

Regularly engage in stress-relieving activities. Some examples include listening to relaxing music, taking baths, practicing meditation or deep breathing, and enjoying a class or favorite activity.

See a healthcare provider as recommended. Talk with them about pain, stress levels, sleep quality, and overall well-being.

Exercise regularly. Moving the body can help alleviate muscle tension and stiffness. Exercise is also a natural stress reliever. Low-impact activities such as walking, swimming, biking, or yoga may be helpful.

The stiffness is accompanied by other symptoms, such as a fever, a headache, or irritability.

The stiffness does not go away within a few days and after trying home treatments such as NSAIDs and gentle stretching.

Summary

A stiff neck is a common problem that a person can usually treat with home remedies and prevention strategies. It usually results from injuries caused by whiplash, sleeping awkwardly, having a poor posture, or stress.

Neck pain is not typically a sign of a more serious issue. Do not ignore it, however, if it comes on suddenly and accompanies other symptoms.

Self Care for Neck and Back Pain

The key to recovering from acute back or neck pain is restricting your activity and taking over the counter medications, because most

back pain is related to muscle strain. In most cases, acute back pain will go away on its own over a period of days. Here are some tips that will help you recover:

1. Take it easy

If you think you've hurt your back, ease up on the pressure you're putting on your back. Many people actually have little choice in the matter—their back pain will force them to drop to their knees or "freeze" in a bent-over position. Others will be able to function somewhat normally, but with uncomfortable pain. Contrary to popular belief, studies on acute back pain actually show that a few days of restricting your activity, and taking the appropriate over-the-counter medication, is all that many people really need to allow the strained muscles to relax and unbind. However, it is important to talk with your health care provider before taking any medication, especially if you are taking other medications or have a chronic medical condition.

2. Ice, then heat

Remember this rule: "Ice first for 48 hours, then heat." Ice and heat can alleviate local pain that comes from muscle and ligament strain. Ice slows swelling and inflammation and acts as a local anesthetic,

but after 48 hours, it loses its effect. Using heat afterwards increases blood flow to the deep tissues and relaxes muscle spasms.

3. Over-the-counter medications

Inflammation is the body's protective response to irritation or injury and is characterized by redness, warmth, swelling and pain. To aid in healing and relieve pain, use of over-the-counter medications such as ibuprofen, naproxen sodium, aspirin or ketoprofen are often recommended. These medications are called non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), and they can effectively reduce inflammation and relieve pain. Prolonged use of NSAIDs can lead to gastrointestinal problems, so it is wise to check with your health care provider before using NSAIDs or any medication. Over-the-counter NSAIDs are intended for short-term use, so never use one for more than a week unless it is recommended by your health care professional.

In some cases, acetaminophen may be recommended. While not an anti-inflammatory drug, acetaminophen can be effective in relieving pain without the risk of gastrointestinal problems that have been associated with prolonged use of NSAIDs. However, acetaminophen can also cause side effects, so it is best to follow these basic rules

before taking any medication: always read the directions on the label; watch for the side effects listed; and consult your health care provider before you begin self-treatment.

4. Massage

If you have a willing companion, gentle massage may provide some relief by stretching tight muscles and ligaments.

5. Don't stop moving

Studies maintain that limited movement of muscles and joints is more effective for treating simple back pain than passive methods such as rest and drugs. Restricting your activity is important, but as the pain eases, you should move your muscles and joints past the point of the initial restriction. Simple exercises can help this process, but it is important to consult your health care provider or a back specialist for the exercise program that is right for you.

6. Adjust your daily routine

When you are in pain, you need to make adjustments to the way you approach daily activities. The key to recovering from acute back and neck pain is maintaining the normal curvature of the spine. Supporting the hollow of your back and practicing good posture will help decrease your recovery time.

Standing

The proper way to stand with your head up, shoulders straight, chest forward, hips tucked in, and your weight balanced evenly on both feet.

Avoid standing in the same position for a long time.

If possible, adjust the height of the work table to a comfortable level.

When standing, try to elevate one foot by resting it on a stool or box. After several minutes, switch your foot position.

While working in the kitchen, open the cabinet under the sink and rest one foot on the inside of the cabinet. Change feet every 5 to 15 minutes.

Sitting

The proper way to sit with your hips and knees at a right angle (use a foot rest or stool if necessary). Your legs should not be crossed and your feet should be flat on the floor.

Sit as little as possible, and only for short periods of time (10 to 15 minutes).

Sit with a back support (such as a rolled-up towel) at the curve of your back. When you are not using a back support or lumbar roll,

follow these tips to find a good sitting position:

Sit at the end of your chair and slouch completely.

Draw yourself up and accentuate the curve of your back as far as possible. Hold for a few seconds.

Release the position slightly (about 10 degrees). This is a good sitting posture.

Sit in a high-back, firm chair with arm rests. Sitting in a soft couch or chair will tend to make you round your back and won't support the curve of your back. At work, adjust your chair height and workstation so you can sit up close to your work and tilt it up at you. Don't hunch or lean over your work. Rest your elbows and arms on your chair or desk, keeping your shoulders relaxed.

When standing up from the sitting position, move to the front of the seat of your chair. Stand up by straightening your legs. Avoid bending forward at your waist. Immediately stretch your back by doing 10 standing backbends.

Driving

Use a back support (lumbar roll) at the curve of your back. Your knees should be at the same level or higher than your hips.

Move the seat close to the steering wheel to support the curve of your back. The seat should be close enough to allow your knees to bend and your feet to reach the pedals

Stooping, squatting & kneeling

Decide which position to use. Kneel when you have to go down as far as a squat but need to stay that way for a while. For each of these positions, face the object, keep your feet apart, tighten your stomach muscles and lower yourself using your legs.

Lifting objects

Figure 3. The proper way to lift a heavy object. Keep your back straight and bend at the knees rather than at the waist.

Try to avoid lifting objects if at all possible.

If you must lift objects, do not try to lift objects that are awkward or are heavier than 30 pounds.

Before you lift a heavy object, make sure you have firm footing.

To pick up an object that is lower than the level of your waist, keep your back straight and bend at your knees and hips. Do not bend forward at the waist with your knees straight.

Stand with a wide stance close to the object you are trying to pick up, and keep your feet firm on the ground. Tighten your stomach muscles and lift the object using your leg muscles. Straighten your knees in a steady motion. Don't jerk the object up to your body.

Stand completely upright without twisting. Always move your feet forward when lifting an object.

If you are lifting an object from a table, slide it to the edge to the table so that you can hold it close to your body. Bend your knees so that you are close to the object. Use your legs to lift the object and come to a standing position.

Avoid lifting heavy objects above waist level.

Hold packages close to your body with your arms bent. Keep your stomach muscles tight. Take small steps and go slowly. To lower the object, place your feet as you did to lift, tighten stomach muscles and bend your hips and knees.

Reaching overhead

Use a footstool or chair to bring yourself up to the level of what you are reaching.

Get your body as close as possible to the object you need.

Make sure you have a good idea of how heavy the object is you are going to lift.

Use two hands to lift.

Sleeping and lying down

Select a firm mattress and box spring set that does not sag. If necessary, place a board under your mattress. You can also place the mattress on the floor temporarily if necessary.

If you've always slept on a soft surface, it may be more painful to change to a hard surface. Try to do what is most comfortable for you.

Use a back support (lumbar support) at night to make you more comfortable. A rolled sheet or towel tied around your waist may be helpful.

Use a firm pillow that supports the curve of your neck.

Do not sleep on your side with your knees drawn up to your chest.

When standing up from the lying position, turn on your side, draw up both knees and swing your legs on the side of the bed. Sit up by pushing yourself up with your hands. Avoid bending forward at your waist.

Sex

If you have ongoing back or neck pain, you may think that sex is difficult or impossible. But pain doesn't have to put an end to your sex life. It is important that you maintain open communication with your partner so that you both avoid frustration, depression, or emotional withdrawal. A good attitude and a willingness to experiment can help you overcome the fear of pain and restore intimacy between you and your partner.

Work with your physical therapist to find the position where your back and neck feel the most comfortable.

Keep your back supported as much as you can.

Be willing to try new positions.

Use a bed with a firm mattress and try to avoid soft surfaces that strain the back.

Look for resources (books & videos) made for people especially with back pain.

Other helpful tips

Avoid activities that require bending forward at the waist or stooping. When coughing or sneezing, try to stand up, bend slightly backwards to increase the curve in your spine.

Preventing pain and injury

Posture. Using correct posture and keeping your spine in alignment are the most important things you can do for your neck and back. The lower back (lumbar curve) bears most of your weight, so proper alignment of this section can prevent injury to your vertebrae, discs, and other portions of the spine. If you have back or neck pain, you may need to make adjustments to your daily standing, sitting, and sleeping habits and learn proper ways to lift and bend. Your workspace may need to be rearranged to keep your spine from slouching. Because extra pounds can make back pain worse, you should maintain a weight that is appropriate for your height and body frame.

Exercise. Regular exercise is important to prevent back pain and injury. A program of strengthening, stretching and aerobic exercises will improve your overall fitness level. Research has shown that people who are physically fit are more resistant to back injuries and pain, and recover quicker when they do have injuries, than those who are less physically fit.

CONCLUSION

Many people experience neck pain because of poor posture and muscle strain. In these cases, your neck pain should go away if you practice good posture and rest your neck muscles when they're sore.

Make an appointment with your doctor if your neck pain isn't improving with home treatments.