

Physiotherapy Department

Acute Neck Pain – a guide to help your recovery

Information for patients



Most acute neck injuries are not serious and the pain will improve over time. It is important to keep your neck moving whilst it is recovering, as this will prevent stiffness and help you to get better faster. Staying still for too long can be unhelpful and can slow your recovery.

The first few days

- Take painkillers for pain relief. Your doctor may have prescribed you some painkillers. Alternatively, your local pharmacist will be able to recommend suitable medicines.
- Try to stay active, even if this means changing the way you do your usual activities at first.
- Applying heat packs on the back of your neck can be soothing, or alternatively try an ice pack. Wrap the ice pack or heat pad in a tea towel before using, to prevent burns or scalds to your skin. Leave this on for 10 minutes at a time.
- Try to sit with an upright posture. If you slouch (sit with your back curved) your chin tends to move forward. This can make your neck feel sore after a while. You may be more comfortable if you support your lower back with a rolled up towel and sit in an upright chair. Get up and stretch regularly.
- Arrange your pillows in bed so there is good support for your neck.

Early exercises

- Move your head up



- and then down;



- lean it to the right and then the left;



- turn your head to the right and then the left.

- Move slowly in one direction and then in the opposite direction. Move your head as far as you feel you can.



- Slowly shrug your shoulders up and down. You can try rolling them as well.
- Gently draw your chin backwards as if making a 'double chin'.



Repeat each movement up to 10 times in each direction every 1-2 hours or as your pain allows. Avoid rolling your head around as this may damage your neck further. You may benefit from taking pain medication 30 minutes before exercising. This will help you feel more comfortable when moving.

Further exercises

Once your neck pain has started to settle you can try these exercises:

- Put your hand on the side of your head and apply pressure. Do not move your head. As you resist the pressure you will feel your neck muscles contracting. Hold the pressure for up to 10 seconds, then release gently.

Repeat on the other side.



- In the same way, push forwards against both hands on your forehead, then backwards against your clasped hands behind your head.
- Sit down and fix your eyes on a point on the wall straight ahead. Close your eyes and turn your head as far as you can to the right. Keeping your eyes closed, turn back so that when you open your eyes you can see the same point in front of you. Check to see how close you were. Try it looking to the left. With practice you will get better at it. You can also try this exercise looking up and down.

Warning signs

You should see your GP or go to Accident and Emergency if you have:

- changes to your vision
- severe muscle spasm in your neck or shoulder area
- “pins and needles”, numbness or weakness in your arms
- any balance problems or difficulty walking.

Further information

- The Whiplash Book – UK Edition: How You Can Deal with a Whiplash Injury. Authors: Kim Burton, Tim McClune, Gordon Waddell. Published by TSO (The Stationery Office)
- www.nhs.uk
- www.patient.co.uk

Questions and how to contact us

If you have any questions, please contact us:

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This leaflet is designed to be used alongside advice given to you by your Physiotherapist. It is not designed to replace their advice.

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk**

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