

Simple exercises



Neck tilt

Tilt your head down to rest your chin on your chest. Gently tense your neck muscles and hold for 5 seconds. Return to a neutral position and repeat 5 times.



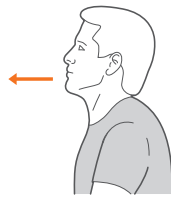
Neck tilt (side to side)

Tilt your head down towards your shoulder, leading with your ear. Gently tense your neck muscles and hold for 5 seconds. Return your head to centre and repeat on the opposite side. Repeat 5 times on each side.



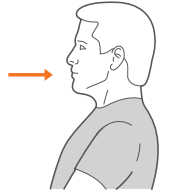
Neck turn

Turn your head towards one side, keeping your chin at the same height and moving within comfortable limits. Gently tense your neck muscles and hold for 5 seconds. Return your head to the centre and repeat on the opposite side. Repeat 5 times on each side.



Neck stretch

Keeping the rest of the body straight, push your chin forward so your throat is stretched. Gently tense your neck muscles and hold for 5 seconds. Return your head to the centre and push it backwards, keeping your chin up. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 5 times.



Summary

- Neck pain is common but most cases aren't caused by a serious problem.
- Most cases of neck pain get better on their own within a few weeks.
- Stay active. Bed rest for more than a couple of days makes it harder to get going. Gradually increase your normal activities and do regular exercise.
- Take painkillers if needed so you can stay active.

Your pain should ease within 2 weeks and you should recover over approximately a 4–6 week period.

You should use the suggested exercises for at least 6–8 weeks to help prevent symptoms returning.

If you have severe neck pain or weakness in your arms/hands, contact your doctor.

Neck pain

This leaflet provides general information about neck pain and simple exercises that may help.

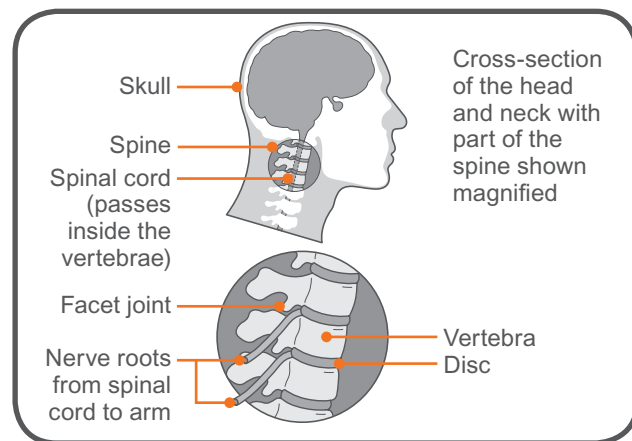


in association with

How does the neck work?

The 7 bones that form the neck are called the cervical vertebrae. They're linked together by facet joints which, together with the neck muscles, allow you to move your head in any direction. Between the bones are discs of cartilage known as intervertebral discs. At the level of each disc, nerve roots branch out from the spinal cord. Impulses travel along these nerves, sending sensations such as touch and pain to the brain. The bones help to support the head and protect the spinal cord – the main nerve which links nerves throughout the body to the brain.

The structure of the head and neck



What causes neck pain?

Cervical spondylosis

Spondylosis occurs due to everyday use over many years. This is where discs become thinner, the facet joints become worn and the spaces between the bones become narrower. Spurs of bone, known as osteophytes, form at the edges of the vertebrae and the facet joints. These

changes are very similar to those seen in osteoarthritis. You can take painkillers to ease pain, and exercise will help you to stretch and strengthen your muscles.

Whiplash

Whiplash injuries are most often seen as a result of car accidents. They're caused by the body being carried forward, causing the head to flip back. Then, as the body stops, the head is thrown forwards. There's often a delay before you feel any pain or stiffness. It's thought that the pain is caused by the stretching of the ligaments and the capsule around the facet joints, along with muscle spasm as the body tries to splint the injury.

Although whiplash can badly strain your neck, most cases improve within a few weeks or months. Seat belts and properly adjusted headrests in cars greatly reduce the damage from whiplash injuries. Gentle exercises to keep the neck mobile will help to prevent longer term problems and get you back to normal as soon as possible.

Tension

Muscles at the back of the neck must always be tensed in order to keep your body upright. When we're stressed we often tense these muscles even more, which can cause neck pain and tension headaches. Relaxation and exercise can help ease tension.

What can be done to help?

Exercise

Exercise is the most important way that you can:

- ease stiffness and pain

- build up muscle strength and stamina
- improve your flexibility and general fitness.

If your neck pain lasts a while, lack of movement can cause the muscles to become weak. This makes it more likely that you'll strain them in future. It's important that you don't rest for too long and keep moving your neck.

Medication

Painkillers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen may help and you should use them if you need to. It's important that you take them regularly and at the recommended dose to help you control the pain and allow you to continue exercising. Don't wait until your pain is severe before taking painkillers.

You shouldn't take ibuprofen or aspirin if you're pregnant or have asthma, indigestion or an ulcer until you've spoken to your doctor or pharmacist. Medication can have side-effects so you should read the label carefully and check with your pharmacist if you have any queries.

Physiotherapy

If your neck pain is affecting your activity and is persisting, ask your GP about referral to a physiotherapist. Physiotherapy can help you to manage pain and improve your strength and flexibility. A physiotherapist can provide a variety of treatments, help you understand your problem and get you back to your normal activities.