

Neck pain

Physiotherapy & Occupational Therapy

The prevention of infection is a major priority in all healthcare and everyone has a part to play.

- Please decontaminate your hands frequently for 20 seconds using soap and water or alcohol gel if available
- If you have symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting, cough or other respiratory symptoms, a temperature or any loss of taste or smell please do not visit the hospital or any other care facility and seek advice from 111
- Keep the environment clean and tidy
- Let's work together to keep infections out of our hospitals and care homes.

Introduction

Neck pain is very common; two out of three people will get it at some time in their life. It is important to remember although neck pain can be very painful it is rarely serious. Neck pain will normally resolve without any treatment for most people within six to 12 weeks.

Common causes

A number of factors have been associated with neck pain. These include:

- Sprain, strain or injury such as a road traffic collision
- Sleeping in an awkward position
- Sitting for long periods without changing your position
- A sudden increase or decrease in your normal activity or exercise levels
- Following a period of increased stress, worry or low mood
- Following a period of poor sleep, fatigue or feeling run down
- Other lifestyle factors such as being overweight and smoking
- A flare up of longstanding neck pain
- Other conditions

Common symptoms

These include:

- Pain in your neck which may travel into the upper part of your back and/or arm
- Stiffness after a period of rest for example, first thing in the morning, after a prolonged period of sitting or driving
- Reduced movement for example, turning your head, or looking up or down
- Increased muscle tension and or headaches
- Disturbed sleep

You may experience constant or intermittent (comes and goes) symptoms that are aggravated by certain activities and reduced by others.

What can I do to help it?

- In the first few days after an onset of neck pain changing or reducing your usual activities may help. However, there is strong evidence that keeping active and gradually returning to all your usual activities and exercise will help you recover
- It is normal to experience some pain during your recovery, but it does not mean you are causing any harm or damaging your neck
- Try to stay at work or return as soon as you are able. Your employer, GP or health practitioner will be able to advise on how to return to your normal work duties

Try some of these self-help tips to aid your recovery:

- Apply a heat or icepack, whichever you find most helpful to the painful area – for up to 15 minutes. **Never apply heat or ice directly to the skin**
- A short course of simple pain medication as advised by your pharmacist or GP may help reduce pain and allow you to move more comfortably
- Keep moving. Regular movement and exercise is safe and helpful for neck pain. It is important to build up gradually – the exercise or activity you enjoy most, is likely to help your recovery
- If sitting causes pain and your job involves long periods of sitting, regular positional change may be helpful
- Good sleep habits and managing stress may help you cope better with your pain

Facts about neck pain

- The neck and surrounding joints, muscles and ligaments are very strong
- Neck pain is rarely linked to serious tissue damage or a life-threatening condition
- X-rays and scans often DO NOT show the cause of your pain
- Creaking or clicking sounds are common in the neck and are RARELY a sign of harm or damage

- Necks DO NOT go 'out of place'
- Your neck can become stronger and healthier with regular movement and exercise
- Improving your sleep and general health is all also important for your neck pain
- Treatments such as surgery, injections and strong medications are NOT very effective in the long term and often have negative side effects
- Your neck pain can often improve with the right management. So even if you have had it a long time regardless of your age, DO NOT give up and get a good plan that you can stick to

When should I seek medical advice?

Call your gp surgery if

- Your pain is getting worse
- You have tried the self-help tips for three to four weeks and your symptoms have not improved

When to seek immediate medical advice if

- You have neck pain following:
 - A significant road traffic collision (> 60 mph) or a fall from a height
 - You have persistent neck pain and tingling, numbness or weakness in your arms
 - You have neck pain with new or severe headaches, tingling, numbness or weakness in your face, changes in your vision or any drooping of your eyelid.
- You have an unexplained change in:
 - Your arm or hand function for example, 'clumsy hands'
 - Your walking pattern due to unexplained weakness in one or both legs
 - Disturbances in bladder or bowel function
 - Disturbances in sexual function

- You feel unwell with your neck pain and have a fever or significant sweating that is keeping you awake at night
- You feel unwell with your neck pain and have a loss of appetite or unexplained weight loss
- You have an unexplained onset of neck pain accompanied by a history of tuberculosis, HIV, cancer or rheumatoid arthritis

Do I need an X-ray or scan?

- X-rays or scans are NOT usually required to diagnose neck pain
- X-rays or scans are NOT able to tell us how much pain you are experiencing
- X-rays and scans often show osteoarthritis, disc prolapses and disc bulges which are common in people WITHOUT neck pain and often this does not change how you manage your pain
- X-rays and scans are best used where a serious injury (for example, a broken bone) or conditions such as cancer or infection are suspected

Why exercise?

It is important to get the neck moving early in order to gain mobility, strength and return to normal function. Early exercise can have a positive influence on tissue healing and reduce the potential for joint and soft tissue stiffness.

Neck exercises

These are suggested exercises and are to be performed within comfortable limits. If you have any concerns about any of the exercises, please seek medical advice.

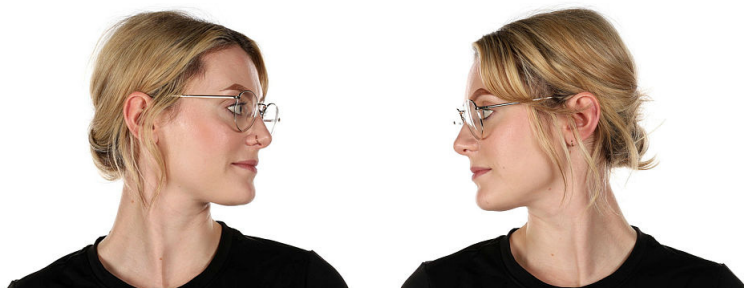
1. Lie on your back on the floor, knees bent and feet flat. Gently tuck the chin back towards the throat keeping the back of the head on the floor. You will feel a stretch at the back of your neck, hold the position for a count of five seconds, then relax. Repeat the exercise 10 times two times per day.



2. Sitting on a chair in an upright position with the bottom at the back of the chair. Tuck your chin back towards the throat without nodding the head. Apply some overpressure gently using your hand. Hold for 10 seconds. Repeat 10 times, two times per day.



3. Sitting on a chair in an upright position with the bottom at the back of the chair and head facing forwards. Keep an upright position whilst turning the head to look over one shoulder to the point where you feel a gentle stretch (do not force the movement) and hold for five seconds. Repeat to the opposite side. Repeat five times in each direction, two times per day. Do not continue if you experience any dizziness.



4. Sitting or standing. Draw the shoulder blades together at the back without the lifting the shoulders to the ears or sticking out the chest. Hold for five seconds, then relax. Repeat 10 times, two times per day.



5. Standing in an upright position, with the hands slightly away from the sides. Draw the arms back allowing the chest to move forward. Hold for five seconds, then relax. Repeat 10 times, two time per day.



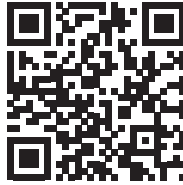
6. Standing at the wall with your feet apart. Place your hands on the wall, shoulder width apart. Engage the tummy muscles by gently pulling the naval towards your spine. Breath normally. Maintain this activation throughout the exercise. Bend the elbows and move the body towards the wall, keeping the back straight. Then push away from the wall to return to the starting position. 10 times, two times per day.



Gradually

- Return to your normal activities
- Resume hobbies and sports

If you are unsure of when to progress your exercises, or you have any concerns about your injury please use the PHIO self-referral platform or scan the QR code below.



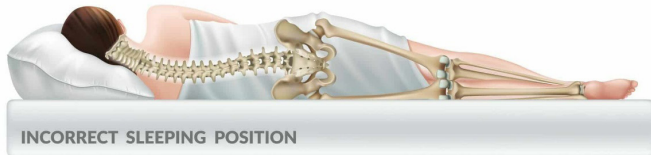
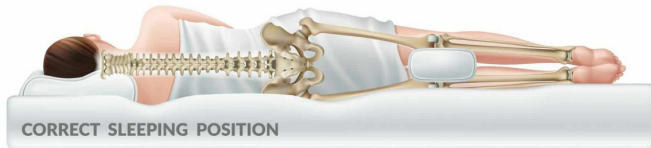
Do I need a fit note?

- If you're off work sick for **seven days or less**, your employer will normally ask you to complete a self-certificate for sick leave as soon as you return to work
- If you're off work sick for **more than seven days** your employer will normally ask for a fit note (or Statement of Fitness for Work) from your GP or hospital doctor
- You can read more information here <https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/caring-carers-and-long-term-conditions/when-do-i-need-a-fit-note/>

Sleeping positions

Lie on your back or your side with you neck and head in a neutral position. This means your head should not be tilted too far forward, backward or sideways. The pillow should support the natural curve of your neck.

Back sleepers can achieve this with one pillow, while side sleepers may need a thicker pillow or maybe two pillows to fill the space between the ear and the shoulder.



Sleeping on your back



Accessing information and support to make healthy lifestyle choices

Online support:

Exercise

- <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/?tabname=exercise-tips>
- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio>

Sleep

- <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/10-tips-to-beat-insomnia/>

Diet

- <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/>
- <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/start-the-nhs-weight-loss-plan/>

Emotional well being

- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/improve-mental-wellbeing/>

English

If you need information in another way like easy read or a different language please let us know.

If you need an interpreter or assistance please let us know.

Lithuanian

Jeigu norėtumėte, kad informacija jums būtų pateikta kitu būdu, pavyzdžiui, supaprastinta forma ar kita kalba, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Jeigu jums reikia vertėjo ar kitos pagalbos, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Polish

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo otrzymać te informacje w innej postaci, na przykład w wersji łatwej do czytania lub w innym języku, prosimy powiedzieć nam o tym.

Prosimy poinformować nas również, jeżeli potrzebowaliby Państwo usługi tłumaczenia ustnego lub innej pomocy.

Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ, ਜਿਵੇਂ ਪੜ੍ਹਨ ਵਿਚ ਆਸਾਨ ਰੂਪ ਜਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਦੂਜੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ, ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਦੁਭਾਸ਼ੀਏ ਦੀ ਜਾਂ ਸਹਾਇਤਾ ਦੀ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

Romanian

Dacă aveți nevoie de informații în alt format, ca de exemplu caractere ușor de citit sau altă limbă, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Dacă aveți nevoie de un interpret sau de asistență, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Traditional Chinese

如果您需要以其他方式了解信息，如易读或其他语种，请告诉我们。

如果您需要口译人员或帮助，请告诉我们。