

# Neck Pain

## Staff information Leaflet

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**This leaflet is designed to give you an understanding of neck pain, the treatment that may be beneficial and some advice on what you can do to help yourself. If you have had trauma to the head or neck you should seek medical opinion before following the advice in the leaflet. If your symptoms persist you should seek advice from your GP or Occupational health service.**

## Introduction

Neck pain or ache is more commonly experienced in the area between the base of the skull and the tip of the shoulder. Symptoms can spread into the top of the arm or down to the hand if the nerves or other local sensitive structures are involved.

Most neck pain does not have a serious cause. Neck pain can occur after an injury (e.g. whiplash) but can also occur without any trauma.

Neck pain can be improved by:

- Keeping active
- Improving general fitness
- Avoiding static postures and moving more

Your neck is strong and flexible, surrounded by strong muscles which support your head on your neck, but allow you to move your head freely.

Occasionally, some people with neck pain may develop signs and symptoms that could indicate a more serious problem. If you develop any of the following warning signs, or if there is a new onset or worsening of your usual arm symptoms, you should see your GP urgently:

- Pins and needles in both arms and legs
- Shooting pains in arms or legs like electric shocks
- A band of pain around the chest or chest tightness
- Clumsiness in hands and fingers causing difficulty with tasks such as fastening buttons, tying laces or counting out coins
- Balance problems including difficulty with walking, going up stairs or recent falls
- Difficulty passing urine or incontinence

**If these symptoms develop rapidly, over a few days, you should seek help immediately at A and E.**

If you suddenly develop stiffness in your neck and both shoulders, you should see your GP.

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## What can I do to help myself?

Acute neck pain normally settles within two weeks. If the nerves are involved this can take a little longer but should be starting to improve within six weeks.

### Pain relief

Simple analgesia such as paracetamol and Ibuprofen can be very effective. You can obtain advice regarding medication from your local pharmacist but remember to read the packet and do not take over the recommended dosage.

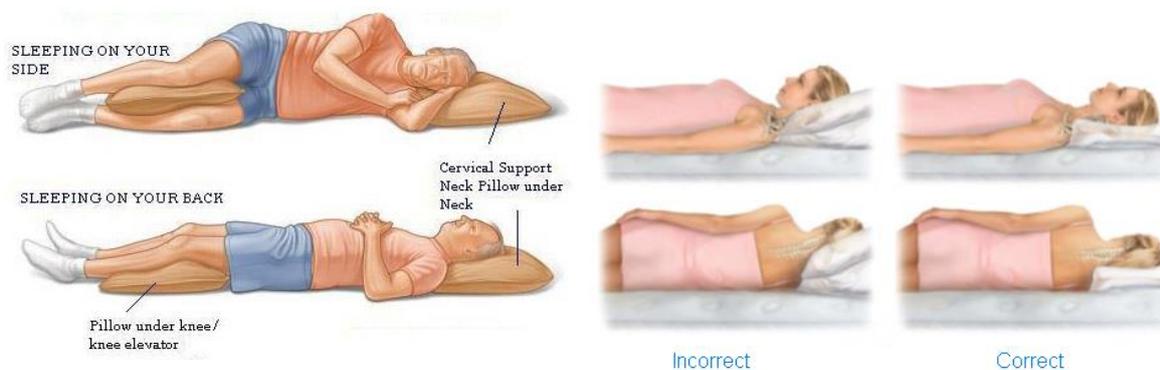
A cold or hot pack can also be helpful in offering symptomatic relief but must not be applied to areas of skin that have poor sensation or are numb.

### Posture

There is no such thing as perfect posture it is more important to change your posture regularly to help maintain a mobile and strong spine.

### Sleeping Hygiene

You may feel more comfortable if your spine rests in a neutral position when sleeping. Your pillows should be placed so that your nose, chin, chest bone (sternum), and stomach button are in line. This prevents the neck resting to one side.



### Relaxation

Learning to relax your muscles is very useful if your neck pain is made worse by stress.

The link below gives advice on how to manage stress and tension, or try the Newcastle OHS pages on the intranet for further advice on wellbeing.

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/Pages/ways-relieve-stress.aspx>

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## Exercise

With any neck conditions the aim is to keep your neck moving as normally as possible. This initially will feel like the last thing you want to do, but you will not damage your neck by moving it gently!

It is good to return to normal activities as soon as possible, as this will help your recovery.

Moving your neck side to side and turning from left to right can help to keep your neck mobile if this is done little and often throughout the day.



## What about work?

Stay active at work or return to work as soon as possible, if necessary with temporary modified duties. This helps you keep your 'work fitness' and prevents your body getting weak, which prolongs pain.

***Remember... You do not have to be pain free to return to or remain at work.***

Maintaining all normal activities including work improves your chance of recovery by keeping you moving.

Working in discomfort will not lead to long term problems and can reduce the risk of re-injury'. It also helps to regain any strength that has been lost in the early stages when the pain stopped you moving normally. The more time spent away from work, the greater the risk to long term quality of life.

You may not be able to return to your full duties straight away. It may take a short period of adjustment before you resume full duties. Often people are concerned about heavy jobs or jobs that require staying in the same position for a long time. You can discuss this with your manager and a short period of modified duties may be possible.

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## What should I do if I am still experiencing problems?

If you are unable to agree on restricted roles with your manager or you are still having problems despite following this advice then your Occupational Health team can help. The Occupational Health team can advise you on how to bridge the gap to help you return to normal activities. You can also gain access to the Occupational Health physiotherapist by:

### Self referral

The Occupational Health can assist in the management of musculoskeletal problems that affect your ability to work. Staff are able to self refer to physiotherapy via the Occupational Health intranet web page or from the trust Occupational health internet page.

<http://nuth-intranet/cms/SupportServices/OccupationalHealth/Physiotherapy.aspx>

[http://www.newcastle-hospitals.org.uk/about-us/staff-information\\_newcastleohs\\_ohs-referrals.aspx](http://www.newcastle-hospitals.org.uk/about-us/staff-information_newcastleohs_ohs-referrals.aspx)

### Management referral

If you feel your symptoms are having a significant effect on your ability to carry out your role, discuss this with your manager and request a referral to the Occupational Health Service.

## For more information on neck pain or how to stay active, why not try:

1 minute body check internet link:

[http://www.newcastle-hospitals.org.uk/downloads/About%20us%20pages/Newcastle\\_OHS\\_1\\_Minute\\_Body\\_Check\\_leaflet.pdf](http://www.newcastle-hospitals.org.uk/downloads/About%20us%20pages/Newcastle_OHS_1_Minute_Body_Check_leaflet.pdf)



<https://www.nhs.uk/>



[www.activenewcastle.co.uk/](http://www.activenewcastle.co.uk/)



<https://www.nhsinform.scot/>

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