



## Neck Pain



If you are struggling with neck pain you are becoming far too familiar with the origins of the cliché “a pain in the neck”. As long as there have been humans there has been neck pain. For most people neck pain is the result of cumulative strains that eventually culminate in pain. The pain may be coming from a worn out disk, bulging disc, pinched nerve, arthritic joint, strained ligaments or more likely a combination of all of the above.

Pain that is originating from your neck can be felt in different ways. Some people may have headaches as a result of strain on the neck; others may feel an ache in the shoulder blade area or a knife like pain in the muscles of the neck. A pinched nerve can cause pain and numbness in your arm. Occasionally, a person will not have pain in the neck but will experience pain in the shoulder blade, arm or have headaches. A detailed examination can confirm whether these symptoms are coming from your neck.

So what can be done to cure neck pain? The most important thing you can do is to assess what you do throughout your day that may be straining your neck and make changes. If you drive a lot and have lousy posture you will not get better until you improve your posture and take breaks from driving. Do you spend time at a computer? Make sure that your computer station facilitates optimal posture and positioning. Like to read -- prop your material up so that your neck is not being strained. Your head weighs 10 to 12 pounds. It is like a heavy bowling ball that when balanced on your shoulders isn't stressful but hold that bowling ball a few inches in front of you and you will be wanting to set it down pretty quickly.

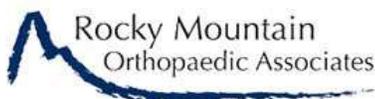
Do you wake up with neck pain? If so, your sleep position could be contributing to your neck pain. Your pillow should support your neck in a neutral position (not high or low). You may also benefit from additional support around your neck. A rolled up towel under your pillow or a pillow case rolled up and safety pinned around your neck can provide additional supports. Do not sleep on your stomach if you awake with neck pain – this is a habit that often needs to be changed as we age.

Walking is very healthy for your neck. Typically we have good posture while we walk and the rhythmic up, down and slight rotation of your body is healthy for your neck. Try to get a 30 minute walk in every day especially if your occupation is sedentary.

Ice is usually the best way to ease your neck pain. Fifteen minutes reclined with a nice ice pack around the neck can often do wonders for neck pain. Some people get very tense with ice application – if this is the case with you go ahead and try a heating pad. In general ice is better for pain and heat is better for stiffness.

Your physical therapist can give you more specific guidance on what exercises and treatments will be most beneficial for you. Additional treatments can include: stretching, strengthening, postural training, traction, massage, manipulation, electrical stimulation or discussion regarding injections or possible surgery.

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