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## Intermediate Care and Community Directorate

# Neck Injury Advice

Physiotherapy Department





## Neck Injury Advice

Neck injuries can occur during or after a road traffic accident or sudden jerking movements. The soft tissues in the spine are stretched and strained after the body is thrown in a sudden forceful jerk. Pain in the neck may not present immediately but usually occurs after a few hours. This usually worsens over the first 2 days, and then gradually eases off, but this can be over a number of weeks. An X-ray is not usually necessary for the assessment of your injury. Most soft tissue neck injuries settle without treatment. Despite the pain the best way to help your neck is to stay active and restore normal movement and function to your spine as soon as possible

**Although serious neck problems are rare you should see your doctor if :**

- you are having blackouts, dizziness or blurring of your vision
- you are experiencing prolonged numbness, pins and needles or weakness in one or both of your arms.

## How can you help yourself?

Please seek the advice of a Pharmacist/GP regarding the use of simple pain relief medication. This will help to reduce pain and allow you to keep active.

As an alternative you can rub anti-inflammatory creams over tender areas. Or use heat or cold packs.

5. Sitting. Tilt your head toward one shoulder until you feel the stretch on the opposite side. Avoid poking chin.

Hold for approx. 5 seconds.  
Repeat 5 times.



Once your pain is improving you can progress the exercise by following the steps.

6. Sitting on a chair. Hold on to the side of the chair with the hand on the side to be stretched. Put the other hand over the head on the opposite. Put your hand on your ear, bend you head away from the side to be stretched.

Hold 10 seconds.  
Repeat on the other side.



If your symptoms are not improving during the weeks following your injury, contact your doctor. He may, if he considers it appropriate, refer you onto a Chartered Physiotherapist.

2. Sitting. Turn your head to one side until you feel a stretch.  
Hold for approx. 5 seconds.  
Repeat to other side.  
Repeat 5 times.



3. Sitting straight with head supported slide the back of your head up the wall and tuck your chin in and feel a lengthening down your neck.  
Hold 5 seconds.  
Repeat 10 times



4. Sitting roll your head forward until you feel a stretch the full length of your neck.  
Hold 5 seconds.  
Uncurl your neck back to the start position.



## Sleeping Posture

Sleep can often be disturbed following a neck injury, some tips to aid a better night sleep include;

- Try to sleep on a good mattress on your back or side with a small pillow to ensure your neck feels adequately supported. Often a rolled up hand towel can provide a little extra support.
- Try and to keep your head and neck aligned with your spine.

The pictures below give some examples of good sleeping positions



## Daily Activity

Avoid staying in one position for too long or doing a repetitive activity for long periods. Try to change what you are doing after 15-20 minutes.

You may have good and bad days - this is normal.

Try and ensure that you move as normally as possible, guarding against movements can increase muscle tightness in the neck and shoulders which can lead to increased aching and stiffness. Trying the exercises provided in this leaflet can help.

## Relaxation

Guarding against sore movements can cause muscle tightness in the neck and shoulder muscles. In the long term this will increase aching and stiffness. Regular movement of the shoulders and neck, use of gently heat or ice can help.

## Travelling

- Do not wear a collar to drive in.
- Make sure you have adjusted your car seat and head rest.
- Take regular breaks if driving long distances.

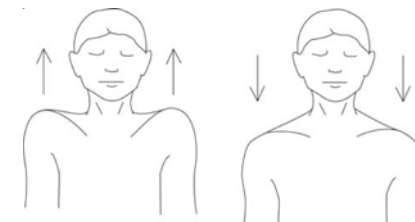
## Exercises/Stretches to avoid stiffness and pain

These are important to prevent neck stiffness and may help to reduce pain. Begin the exercises straight away after your injury.

It is normal to feel some discomfort while exercising however it should not significantly increase your pain. If you overdo it, you may aggravate the pain but you will not do any harm. A rule of thumb is to do little and often of what feels comfortable and as pain subsides build up the exercises.

The presence of pain does not necessarily mean more damage - **hurt does not mean harm**.

Getting the movement back is very important - below are some exercises to help:



1. Sitting or standing lift your shoulders, push them down.  
Repeat 10 times