

Neck Pain

This leaflet offers more information about neck pain. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a clinician.

What is neck pain and why have I got it?

Neck pain is a common condition – two out of three of us will experience it at some point. In most cases, it is not caused by a serious problem and it is not possible to identify the exact cause of neck pain.

It can occur for no reason whatsoever but can sometimes be a result of sustaining an awkward position or movement i.e. when sleeping. It can also be caused by more sudden forceful movements, i.e. during sport or sometimes in car accidents. This is commonly known as 'whiplash'.

What are the signs and symptoms?

- Pain
- Reduced movement
- Stiffness
- Muscle spasm or tight muscles.

How long will it take to recover?

Most neck pain gets better by itself but gentle activity can speed up recovery and prevent your pain becoming persistent. Try to return to normal activities as soon as possible to help maintain movement in your neck.

Most neck pain does not cause lasting problems - your body is very good at healing itself.

How do lifestyle factors contribute?

Research suggests that lifestyle factors can play an important role in making the neck structures more sensitive, which increases the likelihood that you will experience neck pain. Some of these factors include:

- Poor quality and quantity of sleep
- Noticing more muscle tension in your neck
- Lack of physical activity
- Stressful periods in your life.

What treatments are available?

Over the counter **painkillers** are often the most effective in relieving neck pain and these can help you get moving and active again. Speak to your GP or a pharmacist about what medication is appropriate for you.

Gentle heat from a hot water bottle, bath, or a shower can help reduce muscle spasm and pain.

A **cold pack** (an ice pack or a pack of frozen peas wrapped in a damp towel) can also give short term pain relief. Use whichever pack you find the most helpful, and apply to the sore area for up to five to 10 minutes, every two hours.

Anxiety and stress can make pain feel worse; therefore finding **relaxation strategies** to relax the entire body can also be very useful if your neck pain is made worse by stress.

Gentle self-**massage** around the neck, shoulders and upper back may help relaxation and provide short-term pain relief.

Exercising regularly can be really beneficial. Try walking and jogging in the early days, but aim to do more intensive exercise as pain allows - like running, cycling or swimming.

Physiotherapy can be really helpful in managing neck pain if the above measures don't help. Your physiotherapist will probably advise you on suitable exercises and pain relief, as well as tips on how to prevent further problems.

Is there anything I can do to help myself?

You should keep active and maintain your normal daily activities – try to spread them throughout the day as much as possible to pace yourself. Mostly, it doesn't appear to matter what type of exercise you do, as long as you remain active. So chose something that you like doing. Your physiotherapist can help to guide you with this.

Getting inactive muscles and joints moving may be uncomfortable to start with but will become much easier as you get flexibility back.

Completing the following exercises throughout the day may help reduce your neck pain and stiffness:

1. While sitting, bring your chin down to your chest. Hold for five seconds. Then look up to the ceiling and hold for five seconds. Repeat this three times.



2. While sitting, look over to your right shoulder, hold for five seconds. Then look over to your left shoulder and hold for five seconds. Repeat this three times.



3. While sitting, take your left ear to your left shoulder, hold for five seconds. Then take your ear to your right shoulder and hold for five seconds. Repeat this three times.



Things to remember

Therapists are there to support you - don't feel you have to know everything or have to work through this alone.



Be consistent – do your exercises regularly as guided, but remember to give yourself appropriate amounts of rest as well.



Be patient – recovering from neck pain takes time. But if you do it right the first time, you'll be much better prepared for self-managing if you get a flare up in the future.



Stay healthy – exercising as able, sleeping and eating well, as well as being positive can all affect your pain levels and your general health.

Useful sources of information

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

<https://www.csp.org.uk/conditions/neck-pain>

Versus Arthritis

<https://www.versusarthritis.org/get-help/>

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your condition, please contact the MSK Physiotherapy team on 020 8812 4018 (Monday to Friday 8.30am to 4.30pm).

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit

<https://www.stgeorges.nhs.uk/service/musculoskeletal-outpatient-physiotherapy/resources-for-patients-start-your-recovery-today/>

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health. **Web:** www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all of our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



Reference: THE_NP_01 **Published:** December 2020 **Review date:** December 2022