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Strained your Neck?



The term "neck strain" is a general term used to describe an injury to the muscles and/or ligaments of the neck.

What are the functions of the muscles and the ligaments of the neck?

The complex anatomy of the cervical region of the spine (neck) allows it to perform various functions. The cervical region supports the weight of the head, protects the spinal cord and it allows the neck to move by providing attachment sites for muscles. The muscles located closest to the vertebrae (neck bones) help to provide stability to the spine. The muscles located further from the vertebrae play a role in movement of the neck. Ligaments are like strong ropes that help connect bones and provide stability to joints. Six major ligament groups run down the spine and the low back. These ligaments attach to each vertebra and form a strong support system for the spine and the neck.

How do neck strains occur?

Neck strains can occur as a result of motor vehicle accidents, during sporting activities or as a result of repetitive stress at work. In some cases the muscles and ligaments around the neck can become injured during a single activity, or the neck can become injured during a repetitive task.

What does a neck strain feel like?

There is usually pain and tenderness around the muscles or ligaments that are injured. The affected muscles may also tighten up to protect the injured area, limiting the available mobility on your neck.

People with these warning signs need to see a doctor about their neck pain right away.

Changes in the way their bowels and/or bladder work.

Weakness in their arm muscles.

Loss of arm muscle endurance.

Pain and numbness that travels down either arm.

Pain that is made worse by sneezing or coughing.

Pain associated with fevers, weight loss, or anything else that suggests that they are feeling unwell.

Pain that consistently wakes them up at night.



How is a neck strain diagnosed?

Diagnosis of a neck strain is done with a medical examination. If some type of trauma was the cause, X-rays of the neck may help to rule out a fracture. Depending on the severity of the problem, further tests such as MRI and CT scans may also be required to rule out other causes of neck pain.



What is the treatment for a neck strain?

In most cases, the damaged muscles and ligaments will begin to repair themselves.



1. In the acute stages avoid aggravating activities such as lifting, however gentle movement in the pain free range is good.
2. Use ice for the first 48 hours after an injury to minimize inflammation. Ice for 15 minutes at a time.
3. As symptoms decrease gradually increase movement of the neck – but note that it can take about 8 to 10 weeks for healing to be complete.
4. Be sure to maintain and correct posture, avoiding a

“forward head position”.

5. Sleep with just 1 pillow at night – either a feather pillow or a supportive orthopedic pillow.
6. Physical therapy will help optimize and promote healing and assist getting patient back to health. Treatment may include education on activity modification, proper posture, and exercises, manual joint and soft tissue mobilization of the affected area, and modalities such as ultrasound, electrical stimulation, cold laser, heat and ice to help with pain.
7. Doctors may prescribe anti-inflammatory medications, pain medications and/or muscle relaxants.
8. After someone recovers from a neck strain it is important to maintain a healthy neck with proper posture, and exercises to maintain strong neck muscles. These measures may help to decrease the chance of another neck strain.



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