

How to treat your injured neck



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Your neck is made up of a number of bones bound together by strong discs and ligaments. It is also protected by strong muscles.

Neck sprains can involve damage to the ligaments and muscles. Often symptoms may not arise for several hours or even one to two days after injury.

Common complaints include pain and stiffness in the neck, shoulders, upper back and sometimes lower back.

Headaches, nausea, dizziness, loss of concentration and tearfulness can also occur. Symptoms may last from a few days to a few weeks.

It is reassuring to know that most neck sprains are not serious and rarely result in permanent harm.

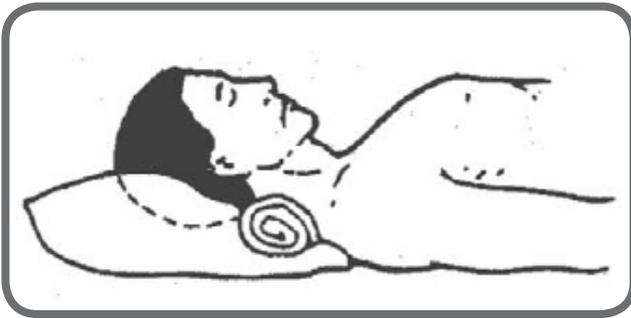
All recent research strongly advises an early return to normal activity.

This leaflet gives general advice on how to manage your injury.

During the first 24 - 48 hours

- You may be aware of your neck becoming more stiff and painful. Depending on your level of symptoms and the type of job you do, you may need to rest and stay off work for a day or two. However, if symptoms allow, try to continue with normal daily activities. This will not cause further damage to your neck. Just be sensible and take things steady, or change the way you do them.
- Where necessary take medication to ease the symptoms. It will be most effective if taken at regular intervals.
- Either heat or cold can be used to relieve pain in the back of the neck and shoulders. Use whatever gets best results for you. A bag of frozen peas wrapped in a damp towel can be applied for up to 20 minutes. For maximum effect apply every two hours. Alternatively, you may prefer heat using a heat pad, hot water bottle (in a cover) or having a hot shower.

- Adopt positions that are comfortable for you, but move around frequently to prevent stiffness. Good posture is important, so avoid slumping when sitting. If necessary, place a small rolled towel or a cushion in the lower back to give support.
- When lying, you may find it helpful to alter your pillow height. A small rolled towel can be placed in the bottom edge of your pillow case, or you can tie your pillow in half (butterfly pillow) for extra support.



After 48 hours

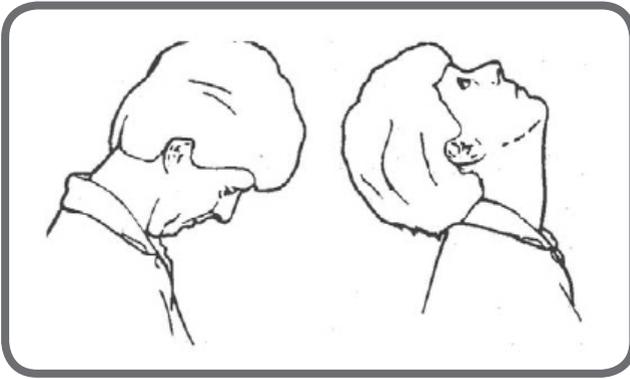
It is essential to start exercising your neck and shoulders. Restoring range of movement will make everyday activities easier and less uncomfortable. Remember - **movement is good for you.**

The following exercises should be performed slowly and thoroughly **moving into discomfort but short of pain.** Before you start, make sure you are sitting up straight on a firm chair.

Exercise 1

First drop your chin down on to your chest, hold for a count of three, then lift your head up looking towards the ceiling and hold for three.

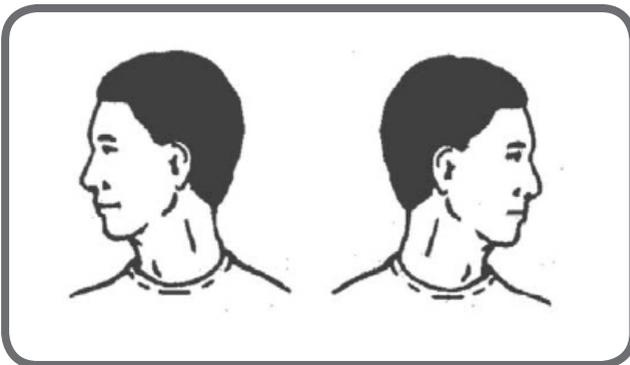
Repeat x 5.



Exercise 2

Look round over each shoulder in turn, moving as far as possible and holding for a count of three.

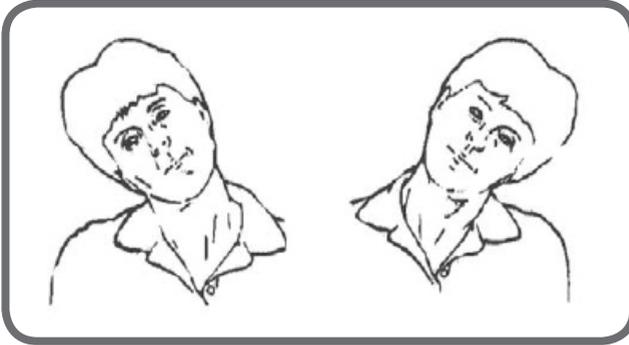
Repeat x 5 each side.



Exercise 3

Tilt your head to one side dropping your left ear down towards your left shoulder. Hold for a count of three and repeat to the right side.

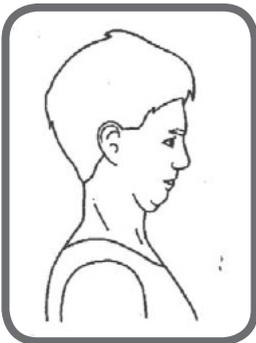
Repeat x 5 to each side.



Exercise 4

Sitting up straight, tuck your chin in and hold for a count of three.

Repeat x 5.



Exercise 5

Stretch up above your head as far as possible with each arm in turn. Then reach up behind your back as far as possible with one arm then the other.

Repeat each exercise x 3.

Warning

Stop the exercises above if any of the following consistently occur and contact your doctor.

- Pins and needles or numbness in arms or legs.
- Difficulty with balance or walking.
- Disturbed vision.
- Dizziness.
- Pain spreading into your arm.

During the first two weeks avoid excessive discomfort during activity. You can return to exercise such as swimming, cycling and gentle gym activities. However, avoid impact and contact sports until you feel fully fit, free of pain, mobile and strong.

Depending on how severely your neck is sprained it may take up to eight weeks to recover, occasionally longer.

It is quite normal to be aware of the following:

- Morning stiffness in the neck.
- Discomfort at the end of stretching movements.
- Discomfort after being in one position for some time.

All this should gradually settle as your neck recovers and strengthens.

Remember

- Rest is needed for no more than 1 - 2 days.
- After 48 hours start exercises to regain movement.
- Stay active and keep moving.
- Try and continue with normal daily activities, just modify them.
- By 8 weeks you should have returned to all of your usual activities.

If you are concerned about your neck, please consult your GP.

NHS Constitution. Information on your rights and responsibilities.

Available at **www.nhs.uk/aboutnhs/constitution**

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How to contact us:



0117 414 5100



www.nbt.nhs.uk/ed

If you or the individual you are caring for need support reading this leaflet please ask a member of staff for advice.

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