

# Neck and Arm Pain

Neck pain is common but most cases are not caused by a serious problem. The vast majority of cases of neck pain get better on their own within a few weeks. Sometimes you can experience symptoms in your arm too such as referred pain or pins & needles or numbness. Fortunately, the vast majority of these cases can be completely managed effectively with Physiotherapy advice and exercises. These can take a little longer to settle and may take a few months to completely resolve but usually do very well.

Please contact your local Physiotherapy team if you are struggling with your pain, have constant arm symptoms or symptoms into both arms at the same time, or notice any weakness like a weaker grip or dropping things. Similarly, contact us if you are not seeing any improvements in after 5-6 weeks or suffer other issues like blacking out, dizziness or nausea.

## What can I do to help?

The following initial advice should help you to get started:

**Pain relief:** Basic painkillers (like paracetamol) or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory gels (such as Ibuleve or Voltarol) are easily available over the counter without the need for prescription. These can be very effective as they lessen your discomfort and importantly allow you to keep your neck moving. However, please check the labels for instructions/safe usage and any possible reasons why you should not use them. If you are currently taking any form of medication it is advisable to consult your GP or pharmacist before taking additional pain tablets.

**Relaxation:** Tense muscles caused by anxiety and stress can increase the amount of discomfort you feel. You may find controlled breathing exercises and relaxation/mindfulness helpful.

**Heat or Ice:** Heat is often useful for easing pain using a hot water bottle or wheat pack. Use for 15-20 minutes at a time and repeat several times a day as necessary. However, if you have had a recent injury or flare up you may find it more therapeutic to use an ice pack to reduce your pain/irritation. A packet of frozen peas wrapped in a tea-towel works well. Leave in place for up to 15 minutes at a time. Again, this can be repeated several times a day if found helpful.

**Sleep:** Changing the number or position of pillows may be helpful. There is no one 'correct' position; choose whatever position given you most comfort however do try to avoid using more than two pillows.

**Rest vs. activity:** It is usually best to carry out your normal activities, but try not to overdo it. Let pain be your guide; short-lasting/temporary discomfort is fine but worsening or constant 24/7 pain indicates you are likely doing too much and need to take things a little easier. You need to pace yourself to start with and try to do a bit more each few days.

**Recent injury:** A short period of rest may be helpful but for no more than one to two days after an injury. As soon as possible start some gentle stretches and neck movements. It is best to avoid neck collars as this leads to your neck becoming stiffer and sorer. Do not drive until you have sufficient movement to be safe to do so.

## Exercise

Exercise can be an extremely beneficial treatment for your neck pain as it can gradually restore your neck movements and help ease stiffness and soreness.

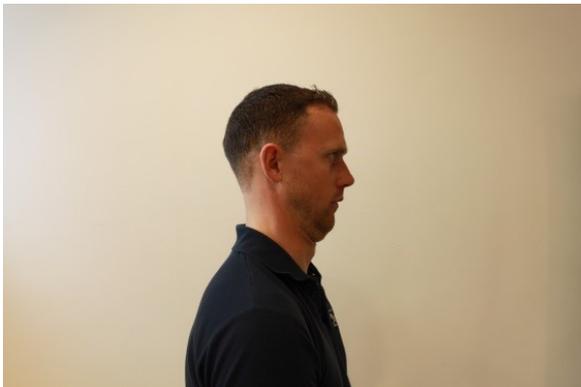
Repeat the following exercises several times a day. Ideally perform some type of neck stretch/'gaping' movement every couple of hours (it doesn't need to be the whole programme). Avoid movements or positions that causing a pinching feeling in your neck or lasting arm symptoms. It may take a few weeks before you start to see significant improvement.

If your neck does not start to improve over the next 6 weeks, or gets worse despite the exercises, then please contact your Physiotherapist.

### Exercise 1 – Neck Retractions

Draw your chin in gently to make a double chin keeping your eyes looking straight ahead and feel the stretch in your neck

Repeat 5 times



### Exercise 2 – Neck Rotations

Turn your head to look over your shoulder to achieve a stretching feeling. Hold for 5 seconds. If it causes pain down the arm when stretching it can help to boost/support your arm in an elevated position or folding your arms.

Avoid movements that elicit a painful pinching feeling

Repeat 5 times



### Exercise 3 – Side Bends

Tilt your head to one side whilst looking straight ahead. Hold for 5 seconds.

You may want to just stretch away from the painful side only. If it causes lasting pain down the arm when stretching then it can help to boost/support your arm in an elevated position or folding your arms.

Avoid movements that elicit a painful pinching feeling

Repeat 5 times

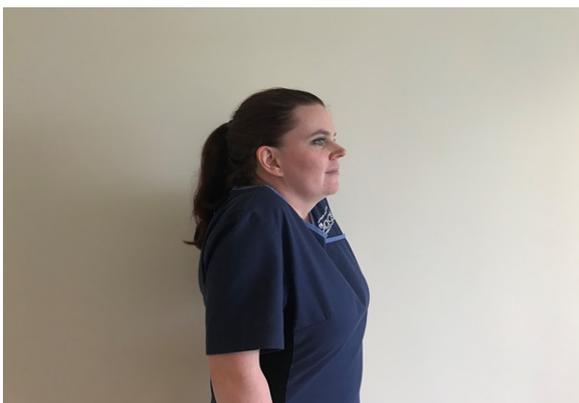


### Exercise 4 – Shoulder Rolls

Roll your shoulders slowly taking them up, back and down as far as you can.

Repeat 10-20 times

If you find this very easy, you can progress this exercise by holding some light weights in your hands for a little added resistance (around 1-2kg weights to begin). As able, gradually increase the loading to help start desensitise the sensitive muscles around your neck/shoulders



### Exercise 5- 'Looking under your armpit'

Tilt your head both **forwards and away** from the painful side (opposite ear tipping to the opposite shoulder). The motion is as if looking behind you under the armpit of your painful side. Oscillate gentle into a stretching feeling 5-10 times as tolerated. If you get lasting arm symptoms then either perform smaller movements or try supporting the arms in a slight elevated position (arms shrugged in a folded position)

For example; if you have right arm symptoms then perform the movement as shown below:



Repeat every few hours during the day if possible to get the best effect. Continue regularly if helpful until your symptoms have settled

### Exercise 6 – Arm Mobility Exercises

To help keep you shoulder mobile and ease the possible stiffness/pain; slide your arm backwards/forwards.

You can give assistance through the other arm by using a towel on the table as shown if needed

Perform 5-10 reps

Perform as big as movements as comfortably tolerated. Avoid forcing into movements that cause lasting arm symptoms

