

Neck Strain: Causes and Remedies

By definition, a neck strain is not a serious injury. However, the pain and dysfunction that it causes can be significant. This article reviews both first aid approaches to alleviate the pain, as well as signs and symptoms that indicate when to see a doctor.

Causes of Neck Strain

The anatomy of the cervical spine is a marvelous construct that houses and protects the delicate spinal cord, provides support for the head, and allows for a high degree of mobility and range of motion. But the same engineering that allows this area of the spine to be so flexible also leaves it vulnerable to injury.

Triggers for the onset of neck muscle strain can be traced to several common activities that strain the neck anatomy, such as:

- Too much time in an awkward position, such as hunched over a steering wheel while driving, hunched forward to view a computer monitor, or cradling a phone in the crook of the neck
- Sleeping in a position that strains the neck, such as with a pillow that is too high or too firm
- Carrying a heavy suitcase or other object on one side of the body
- Any form of trauma that impacts the neck, such as from whiplash in a car accident, or from a fall in which one lands on the top of the head

Most episodes of neck muscle strain (or other soft tissue strain or sprain, such as ligaments or tendons) result in a stiff neck and/or pain in a shoulder muscle. Symptoms typically include difficulty and pain when moving or rotating the head or neck.

Neck Muscle Strain Remedies



Most minor strains of ligaments, tendons and muscles in the neck heal in a relatively short amount of time (e.g. one or two days).

Until the symptoms subside, there are many self-care remedies that are effective in alleviating the pain and stiffness, such as:

Applying ice or cold packs. The cold helps reduce inflammation in the area, which in turn allows it to heal. The ice or cold pack should be applied in twenty-minute intervals during the initial 24 hours.

Applying heat. The heat helps bring nutrient-rich blood flow to the area to stimulate a healing response. Some people prefer moist heat, such as from a hot bath or shower. Others find more relief from applying continuous low level heat from a heat wrap (such as brand name Thermacare, or store brand heat wraps)

Over-the-counter medications. Taking anti-inflammatory medicines, such as ibuprofen (e.g. Advil) or naproxen (e.g. Aleve), will reduce the inflammation, which in turn will help reduce the pain. One can also take pain relievers, such as acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol), which reduces the perception of pain.

Massage. A gentle massage will to stimulate blood flow in the area, which helps it heal.

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Sources:

<http://www.spine-health.com/conditions/neck-pain/neck-strain-causes-and-remedies>



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