



Greenville Medical Associates

Neck Pain And Exercises

Overview

Exercising your neck can make it stronger, more flexible and reduce neck pain caused by stress and fatigue. The neck muscles are attached to the bones of the shoulders, spine, and head. The most common causes of neck pain are bad body posture, bad movement, and arthritis of the neck.

Overusing the muscles, especially if it is in one position, can also cause neck pain. An example of this would be cradling a phone by your ear while you work. Stretching and extending the muscles slowly before exercising the neck is very important to avoid injury. In addition to reducing neck pain, exercising the neck will strengthen the muscles of the neck, upper back, and shoulders and will increase the range of motion in the neck. Always check with your healthcare provider before you start a new exercise program, especially if you have a history of neck injury or pain.

Introduction

Exercising your neck can make it stronger, more flexible and reduce neck pain that is caused by stress and fatigue.

This health information describes neck exercises you can do. You will learn about the anatomy of the neck and causes of neck pain, as well as the benefits of neck exercises and tips for doing them safely. You will also learn ten selected neck exercises. These can be done at home or at work in about 15 minutes to make your neck stronger and more flexible.

Neck Anatomy

The neck supports the head and keeps it aligned with the body. It is at the top most part of the spine. The spine also runs through the mid and the lower back.

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The neck is made up of vertebrae, joints, and muscles. The vertebrae are the bones of the spine. They protect the spinal cord inside it and give support for muscles and joints.

In between the vertebrae are disks. Disks separate the vertebrae and cushion them during movement.

Joints link the vertebrae and allow them to move smoothly. These joints are known as facet joints.

Nerves spread out from the spinal cord between the vertebrae. They carry signals from the brain to the rest of the body. They allow the brain to control body movements like the movements of the arm.

The neck muscles are attached to the bones of the shoulders, spine, and head. They allow the head to turn from side to side. Movement from side to side is known as axial rotation.

The muscles also allow the neck to bend forward and backward. These movements are called flexion and extension.

The neck can also bend from side to side. This kind of movement is called lateral flexion

How much and how far a joint can move is called range of motion. The neck joints have more range of motion of any other joint in the body. Most of the neck movements are a combination of all of axial rotation, flexion, extension, and lateral flexion.

Neck Pain

The most common causes of neck pain are poor body posture, unhealthy movement, and arthritis of the neck.

The neck is healthy when the ears, shoulders and hips are aligned. If your posture is not good, neck and back pain may result.

Sudden movement of the neck muscles can also result in pain. This can happen during exercising. Make sure to stretch before exercising and extend the muscle slowly.

Overusing the muscles, especially if it is in one position, can cause pain. For instance, this can

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happen when a person cradles a telephone between shoulder and head for long periods of time.

Neck muscles that do not get frequent exercise can become weak and more vulnerable to pain.

Accidents and injuries can cause temporary or permanent neck pain. Whiplash is the most common kind of accidental injury to the neck. Whiplash can be caused by accidents that involve sudden movements, like car accidents or falls.

Benefits and Tips

Exercising the neck muscles has three benefits:

- It strengthens the muscles of the neck, upper back, and shoulders
- It makes the neck more flexible, increasing its range of motion
- It relaxes the neck and reduces pain.

Exercising is one way of keeping your neck healthy. Other ways include:

- Maintaining good posture and
- Avoiding accidents

Before you start a neck exercise program, talk to your healthcare provider, especially if you have had a neck accident or a history of neck problems.

Stretch slowly, and avoid sudden movement. Pay attention to your muscles stretching. When you have stretched it as far as it can comfortably go, hold for 5 seconds, then slowly return to the original position. Breathe slowly and deeply as you exercise.

Never stretch to the point where it is no longer comfortable. Go to the point where you feel a mild tension, and relax as you hold the stretch. The feeling of tension should go away as you hold the position. If it does not, ease off slightly and find an amount of tension that is comfortable for you.

Do 5 repetitions for each exercise unless your healthcare provider has requested a different number of repetitions.

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The following are the typical steps in a stretching exercise:

- Move slowly to the point where you feel a mild tension in the muscle.
- Hold the position for 5 seconds.
- Return slowly to the original position.
- Relax for 2 seconds
- Repeat the above 5 times.

The program described in the next sections includes 10 neck exercises that can be completed in about 15 minutes. They include:

- Exercises to improve flexibility through stretching the muscles
- Exercises to improve strength through resistance

You can do the exercises at home or at work. They can be done while sitting or standing up. If you feel dizzy during an exercise, stop exercising and sit down if you are not already seated or laying down.

Exercise regularly. If your healthcare provider has asked that you do these exercises, follow his or her directions. These directions may include how long you should hold your stretched position, the number of repetitions, and number of times the exercises are done daily or weekly.

Stretching Exercises

The following are neck exercises that improve flexibility through stretching the muscle:

Exercise 1 Tilt the head forward and backward as far as possible.

- Tilt your head slowly backward, far enough so you can look up.
- Hold for 5 seconds.
- Return slowly to your original position and slowly look forward without arching your back.
- Hold for 5 seconds.

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- Return to the original position and relax.
- Do 5 repetitions.

Exercise 2 Tilt head toward shoulder keeping shoulder stationary.

- Keep your head straight as you slowly tilt it over to the side but don't go so far that you touch your ear to shoulder.
- Hold for 5 seconds.
- Return your head slowly to center position.
- Do the same tilt stretch for the opposite side.
- Return to central position and relax.
- Do 5 repetitions.

Exercise 3 Turn head from side to side as far as possible.

- Slowly turn your head as far as you can
- Hold for 5 seconds.
- Return your head to the center.
- Move your head in the opposite direction.
- Do 5 repetitions.

Exercise 4 Make circular motions with head.

- Slowly rotate your head as if you were drawing a circle with your nose. Move clockwise making 5 circles.
- Return to normal position and relax.
- Repeat the exercise again drawing the 5 circles counterclockwise.

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Exercise 5 Slide your chin forward, while keeping your neck straight, and then slide it back by tilting down slightly.

- Slide your chin forward while keeping your neck straight.
- Hold this position for 5 seconds.
- Return your head back and keep the chin straight or slightly down.
- Hold this position for 5 seconds.
- Return to normal position and relax
- Do 5 repetitions.

Resistance Exercises

The following are neck exercises that increase strength through resistance:

Exercise 6 Holding both hands against your forehead, try to move your head forward but resist the movement with your hands.

- Hold both hands against your forehead.
- Try to move your head forward but resist the movement with your hands. Gradually press harder, but do not let any movement take place. Use your neck muscles to keep your head in the same place
- Hold for 5 seconds.
- Return to normal position and relax.
- Do 5 repetitions.

Exercise 7 Using clasped hands to give some resistance at the back of your head, try to push your head back against your hands but resist the movement with your hands.

- Place both hands behind your head.

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- Try to move your head backwards but resist the movement with your hands. Gradually press harder, but do not let any movement take place. Use your neck muscles to keep your head in the same place. Don't tip your chin.
- Hold for 5 seconds.
- Lower hands and relax.
- Do 5 repetitions.

Exercise 8 Using your right hand against the side of your head, try to touch your shoulder with your ear but resist the movement with your hand.

- Hold one hand against one side of your head.
- Use your hand to resist the movement as you try to touch your shoulder with your ear. Gradually press harder, but do not let any movement take place. Use your neck muscles to keep your head in the same place
- Hold for 5 seconds.
- Lower hand and relax
- Do 5 repetitions. Repeat for opposite side and do 5 repetitions.

Shoulder Exercises

When you have neck problems, it is rarely just the neck that is the problem. The pain usually involves the spine and the shoulder. It is good to do shoulder girdle exercises along with the neck exercises in order to loosen up this area.

Exercise 9 Shrug your shoulders as far up as you easily can, then downwards, further than you normally would.

- Look straight and keep your neck straight.
- Slowly raise both shoulders up.
- Hold for 5 seconds.
- Lower shoulders so that they are lower than your starting position.
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- Return to normal position
- Relax.
- Do 5 repetitions

Exercise 10 Bring your shoulders to the front then brace them right back, pulling your shoulder blades together. Make it a large, slow, repeated movement.

- Raise your arms with elbows bent to shoulder height.
- Slowly move your forearms together trying to pull your shoulder blades together.
- Hold for 5 seconds.
- Return to starting position and keep moving your arms back squeezing your shoulder blades together.
- Hold for 5 seconds.
- Return to starting position and relax.
- Do 5 repetitions.

Summary

The following is a summary of the ten neck exercises described in the previous section. Do 5 repetitions for each exercise unless your healthcare provider has requested a different routine.

1. Tilt the head forward and backward as far as possible.
2. Tilt head toward shoulder keeping shoulder stationary.
3. Turn head from side to side as far as possible
4. Make circular motions with head. First do this clockwise and then counter clockwise.
5. Slide your chin forward, while keeping your neck straight, then slide it back by tilting down slightly.

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6. Holding both hands against your forehead, try to move forward but resist the movement with your hands.
7. Using clasped hands to give some resistance at back of head, try to push your head back against your hands but resist the movement with your hands.
8. Using your right hand against the side of your head, try to touch your shoulder with your ear but resist the movement with your hand. Then repeat with the left hand and the left side of the neck.
9. Shrug your shoulders as far up as you easily can and then downwards further than normal.
10. Bring your shoulders to the front as if you are trying to get them to meet at the middle then brace them right back, pulling your shoulder blades together. Make it a large, slow, repeated movement.

Conclusion

People need strong, flexible muscles in their necks to support their heads. Stress and fatigue show up early in neck muscles and this causes pain. Poor posture and poor body mechanics can lead to chronic neck problems.

Exercises make the neck stronger and more flexible. To maintain the strength and flexibility of your neck, do each type of exercise regularly or as requested by your physician

Before you start a neck exercise program, talk to your healthcare provider, particularly if you had a neck accident or history of neck problems.

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