

Four Quadrant Neck Exercises

A fair amount of the pain we experience in the neck is due to weakening of the muscles that manage the head and neck, particularly when we are erect. The exercises I teach come from a series of old osteopathic strengthening maneuvers taught early in the twentieth century. I have not seen them discussed elsewhere. This basic set of exercises for neck pain and arthritis seems very easy. The series is named the “Four Quadrant Neck Exercises.”

The Four Quadrant Neck Exercises are performed in bed in the morning or before bedtime. They should take only a few minutes. The target is to be able to do 20 of each of four movements. Many patients have been shocked by how few they can actually perform the first time they try the movements. Initially some of the movements may be harder to do and some easier. Do not be upset if you cannot do 20 repetitions of a specific movement. It is only a sign that these muscles are weak and need exercise.

The only weight needed is the weight of your head (about 7 or eight pounds):

1. Start on your back with a pillow under your shoulders. Alternatively you can start with your shoulders at the edge of the bed and your head and neck hanging off the bed. Allow your head to extend backwards. From this position lift your head up bringing your chin toward your chest. This uses the muscles on the front of the neck. Now allow your head and neck to return to the extended position. Perform as many neck flexion moves as you can up to twenty.
2. Next turn over on your stomach. Again there should be a pillow under your chest or your head and neck should hang off the side of the bed. Let your head and neck go forward by relaxing. From this flexed neck position, lift your head up, extending it toward your back. This exercises the muscles at the back of the neck. Now allow it to return to the flexed position. Again do as many as you can up to twenty.
3. Now roll up onto your left side. Allow your neck to relax toward the bed or floor. Using the muscles on the up side of the neck pick your head up trying to bend the head and neck toward your upper or right shoulder. Again the target is to be able to do twenty of these side to side movements.
4. Finally roll onto your right side and again do side to side motions toward the upper or left shoulder. Once again your target is to be able to do twenty of these side to side motions.

It may require more than a month of daily exercises before you are able to do twenty of each. Eventually you will find you can do all of them easily and efficiently. It may not take as long to experience a major decrease in neck pain. I would recommend that you continue to do these exercises daily for the rest of your life if you have significant arthritis of the neck. You will definitely see the benefit in decreased neck pain and increased mobility.



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