

INDUSTRIAL SPORTS MEDICINE

NECK PAIN

Neck pain is another very common condition, increasing with age. Most commonly, onset is seen in women in their 50's. Inconveniently, it also accounts for a large percentage of work place injury and sick leave, similar to low back pain. Once any serious medical pathology is ruled out we often give neck pain a very non-fancy term as either "nerve root compression" or "mechanical neck pain disorder". Similar to low back pain the actual cause of neck pain is often unknown despite what imaging such as an MRI or x-ray might show.



Common Risk Factors:

These factors have been found to lead to the development of chronic neck pain, so try to avoid them!

- Factor in age greater than 40
- Coexisting low back pain
- A long history of neck pain
- Cycling as a regular activity
- Loss of strength in the hands
- Worrisome attitude, poor quality of life, and less vitality

Practice your posture:

Alignment is important to remember because the farther forward the head is positioned, the most stress is placed on the spine!

Alternative Diagnosis:

If you present with the following symptoms, your condition may require further evaluation, possibly including physician referral:

- Limited ability to move your neck or mid back region due to discomfort or muscle spasm.
- Headaches
- Pain, numbness or tingling running down into the arm and/or hand
- Or when the symptoms are not improving with treatment

Red Flags or need for Imaging:

High Risk (radiograph likely needed):

- Age 65 years or older
- Dangerous mechanism of injury (fall >3 ft or 5 stairs, axial load to head: diving, MVA involving high speed, rollover, ejection, etc.)

Low risk (if these are present and able to rotate neck 45 degrees to the left and right radiology is not needed):

- Simple rear end MVA
- Walking at any time
- Sitting position
- Delayed onset of neck pain
- No midline tenderness

** If low risk factors are present and you are unable to rotate neck 45o in both directions, then radiology may be necessary.



Deep Neck Flexor Training

Lie on your back with both knees bent up and your arms positioned on a level surface. Perform a chin tuck by nodding your chin towards your neck, then lift your head upward and forward in a slow, controlled motion, still holding the chin tuck. Hold at the top for 6 seconds and then lower, maintaining chin tuck. Reposition your head on the level surface and release the chin tuck. Repeat 10 times.



Pec Stretch

Assume an upright standing position and clasp your outstretched arms behind you in an extended position. Slowly elevate your hands while holding your shoulders back. You should feel a stretch across your chest and front shoulders. Hold 30 seconds at end range; then slowly release the stretch.



Bilateral External Rotation

Begin in an upright posture with elbows at your side, and arms pointed straight ahead. Rotate your arms 90° out to the side while squeezing your shoulder blades together. Repeat 10-12 times.



Scapular Retraction

In a standing position with arms positioned at your sides and shoulders relaxed, squeeze your shoulder blades together making sure not to raise your shoulders or bring your arms behind the plane of your body. Hold for 5 seconds and then release. Repeat 10 times.



Upper Trap Stretch

Assume a neutral posture and position one arm behind the back. Place your free hand on the opposite side of your head. Gently pull your head laterally bringing your ear to your shoulder. Hold 20 seconds at end range, then slowly release stretch.



Levator Scapulae Stretch

Assume an upright posture and position one arm behind your back. Begin by side-bending your neck away, then look down towards your armpit. Using the same side hand, gently pull your head down towards that same direction.



Posterior Row

Begin in an upright standing position with your knees slightly bent and feet shoulder width apart. Grasp onto the handles of a sport cord or elastic resistance band attached at chest height. Hold your arms straight forward at chest height with your palms facing in. Begin by rowing the handles towards your chest until your elbows are bent 90° and positioned at your sides. Pause briefly, then return your hands back to the starting position. Repeat 12 reps x 2 sets.

Prior to starting any fitness program, check with your physician to make sure you are healthy enough to begin an exercise routine.



ICE

The beneficial effects of ice are achieved best with crushed ice placed directly on the skin surface for 5-20 minutes in order to reduce tissue temperature and decrease nerve conduction velocity (pain reduction). Avoid using padding between the skin surface and ice unless using a commercial ice pack.



SLEEP

The majority of tissue healing and growth is done during sleep and is crucial for overall healing potential. The National Sleep Foundation recommends a minimum of 7-9 hours of sleep for a healthy adult.



HEALTHY EATING & HYDRATION

Proper diet and hydration is essential to meet the nutritional requirements needed by the body to heal tissues. Adequate amounts of carbohydrate, protein, and fat are needed for cellular synthesis and growth as well as help to fight against illness and injury. Conversely, diets high in total fat, saturated fat and cholesterol are linked to chronic diseases like coronary artery disease, stroke, diabetes and certain forms of cancer. Drinking a minimum of 10 glasses of water a day also keeps the tissues hydrated and functioning for baseline daily needs.



FITNESS & CONDITIONING

Want the key to reducing the risk of things like aging, alzheimers, injury, heart disease, dementia, bone health, stomach problems... need we go on? You know the answer: EXERCISE! Quality physical activity, both aerobic exercise AND strength training, are cure-alls, literally. Aerobic exercise has even been shown to grow regions in your brain that shrink with age! Even little things like standing more and sitting less are linked to lower risks of cancer, diabetes, and all-cause mortality. The World Health Organization and US Centers of Disease Control and Prevention advise adults to do 150 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic exercise weekly and strengthening two times per week. If this sounds overwhelming, do simple things like walking, cycling, or gardening combined with light weight training or yoga. Exercise doesn't have to be a dirty word. If you enjoy what you're doing, you will be much more likely to stick to it and create a habit to get you living living your best!