

Physiotherapy

INJURY AND POSTURAL PROBLEMS ARE THE MAIN CAUSES OF NECK PAIN. PHYSIOTHERAPISTS CAN IDENTIFY THE REASONS FOR YOUR NECK PAIN AND PROVIDE PROVEN EFFECTIVE TREATMENT.



WHAT CAUSES NECK PAIN?

Your head is heavy and balanced on a narrow support made up of seven bones called vertebrae. The vertebrae are separated from each other by discs, stabilised by joints and ligaments and moved by muscles. Because the neck is so mobile, it is easily damaged. Injury and postural problems are the most common causes of neck pain. Diseases such as arthritis or degeneration of the discs can also cause pain.

NECK INJURIES

Neck injuries most often result from motor vehicle, sports or occupational accidents. Damage may occur to vertebrae, joints, nerves, discs, ligaments and muscles. A common neck injury is the acceleration/deceleration injury or 'whiplash' where the head is thrown forward or backward.

POSTURE

Bad posture can cause neck pain. Ligaments are over-stretched, muscles become tired and the neck joints and nerves are put under pressure.

Slouching your shoulders with your head pushed forward, sleeping with your head in an awkward position, or working with your head down for long periods, will all tend to cause or worsen neck pain.

PREVENTING NECK PAIN

Here is some useful advice to help you control and prevent neck pain:

POSTURE

Think tall: chest lifted, shoulders relaxed, chin tucked in and head level. Your neck should feel strong, straight and relaxed.

SLEEPING

A down pillow or a urethane pillow is best for most people. Avoid sleeping on your stomach. Your physiotherapist will assess and advise you.

RELAXATION

Recognise when you are tense. You may be hunching your shoulders or clenching your teeth without realising it.

WORK

Avoid working with your head down or to one side for long periods. Frequently stretch and change position. Your physiotherapist will show you how.

EXERCISE

Keep your neck joints and muscles flexible and strong with the correct neck exercises. Your physiotherapist will assess for tight or weak muscles and show you specific exercises to treat your situation.

HOW PHYSIOTHERAPY CAN HELP

Physiotherapists will be able to determine the source of your neck pain and treat it. They may use:

- Mobilisation.
- Manipulation.
- Functional and Rehabilitative exercises.
- Encouraging normal activity.
- Postural assessment, correction and advice.
- Relaxation therapy.
- Laser, ultrasound, electrotherapy and heat treatment.
- Massage.

Manipulation can be an effective treatment for neck problems, but it may not be the best option in every situation. After a full examination your physiotherapist will discuss treatment options with you. Your physiotherapist will carefully check your neck before manipulating it to see if other methods, such as mobilisation, would be preferable.

Your physiotherapist can also offer you self-help advice on ways to correct the cause of neck pain, such as practical ergonomic tips for work and in the home, adjusting furniture, relaxation and exercise.



GENERAL

Many physiotherapists in private practice are listed in the Yellow Pages. Physiotherapists also work in public hospitals and community health centres. Check to see if a physiotherapist is a member of the APA. Members of the APA are bound by a professional Code of Ethics and have access to extensive and continuing postgraduate education programmes.

HEALTH REBATES

You may consult a physiotherapist either directly or by referral from your medical practitioner. Most private health insurance funds offer rebates for physiotherapy treatment.

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