

Neck Pain and Headache



Neck Pain and Headache can have a debilitating affect on everyday tasks, work and social life. Neck pain and Headaches are often caused by disorders of the neck or physical and emotional stress. A skilled physiotherapist is able to successfully treat headaches originating from the neck and soft tissues, and show you how to prevent the pain from reoccurring.

How YOUR neck works:



Your neck is a complex structure made up of interconnecting systems:

- The bones or vertebrae that make up the spinal column are separated by discs, which are shock absorbers that support and distribute the weight of your body.
- The spinal cord is housed and protected within the spinal column. Major nerves that connect the spinal cord to other parts of the body pass through the spaces between the vertebrae.
- The spinal column is wrapped tightly in ligaments and supported by muscle.
- The muscles of the neck, upper back and shoulder blade work together to support the spine.

You can follow these simple tips to help prevent your headache:

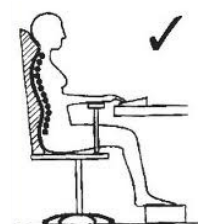
- ✓ Sit up properly and arrange your workstation to best suit your height and shape.
- ✓ Stand every 20 minutes to recover your normal spinal curve.
- ✓ Walk for 40 minutes each day.
- ✓ Try to stretch regularly through the day.
- ✓ Take a break to stretch your legs every hour when driving.
- ✓ See your Physiotherapist if you have pain that doesn't settle down in 48hours.

For many people, headaches start as tension or pain at the top of the neck. As the pain worsens it can spread to the back of the head, the forehead, temples, behind the eye or jaw.

Causes of Neck Pain and related Headache:

Neck pain has many causes and takes many forms. A few are described below:

- **Postural Stress** – poor posture stresses your spine. The soft tissue becomes over-stretched, muscles fatigue, and joints and nerves are put under increased pressure. Sitting in front of a computer that is too high or too low for long hours is a typical cause.
- **Whiplash**– the head is thrown forwards and backwards, or sideways quickly resulting in muscle spasm, pain and inability to turn or move the head freely.
- **Muscle Strains** – minor neck muscle spasms quickly improve on their own. More severe strains will need physiotherapy treatment to relieve pain and promote healing.
- **Disc Injuries** – discs are the shock absorbers of the spine and are anchored to the vertebrae, above and below, so they cannot slip out of place. The disc has a soft, jelly-like interior that can bulge in response to mechanical stresses such as lifting and twisting. This can press on the nearby nerve and lead to pain and pins and needles down the arm.
- **Arthritis** – vertebral joints can be affected by degenerative arthritis, causing inflammation within the joint and the growth of bony spurs on the edges of the vertebrae.



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It WILL get better!

EARLY TREATMENT is the key to ensure a faster, complete recovery.

Physiotherapy Treatment

Early treatment and correction of posture are the key to successful recovery from neck pain. Physiotherapists are experts in human movement and the management in neck pain. They understand how your muscles, bones, joints and ligaments work and how neck pain and headache occur. Depending on the symptoms, timeframe and severity of your injury, the physiotherapy program may include:

- Manual therapy such as massage, joint mobilisations or manipulations
- Education about posture and ergonomic work station set-up including computer and chair.
- Other techniques to reduce pain: traction, pain relieving machines, heat or acupuncture
- Posture retraining
- Exercises to stretch and strengthen the appropriate muscles are also a very important part of your recovery.

Posture retraining and muscle strengthening are the key to reduce the risk that pain will return.

Here are some sample **exercises** for neck pain:

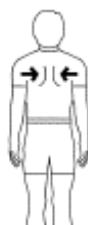
Chin Tuck stretch:



- Sit or stand, looking forward with good posture.
- Gently tuck chin in, making a double chin. Avoid moving into pain.
- Hold 5-10 seconds, Complete 5 times, three times a day.

Shoulder Blade

Posture Correction:



- Sit or stand, with your arms relaxed by your side.
- Gently squeeze your shoulder blades back and down together.
- Hold 5 seconds, Complete 5 times, twice a day.

Side Flexion stretch:



- Place right arm behind back. Grasp arm with left hand as shown.
- Bend neck sideways to the left as you gently pull the right arm. Repeat to the other side
- Hold for 15 seconds, Complete 2 times on each side, twice a day.

Neck strengthening:



- Place right palm against side of face.
- Try to push head into palm, rotating head to the right without moving. Repeat to other side.
- Hold 5 seconds, Complete 5-10 times, once a day.

These exercises have been provided as a guide. In the absence of a visit with a qualified health care professional information in this handout must be considered as an educational service only.

Sapphire Coast Physiotherapy are happy to discuss your neck pain further. A physiotherapist can complete a thorough assessment of your neck and symptoms to develop the best treatment plan to treat your symptoms. For more information, or for an appointment, please phone your nearest clinic.

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