

Early management of Neck Sprain A Patient Information Guide

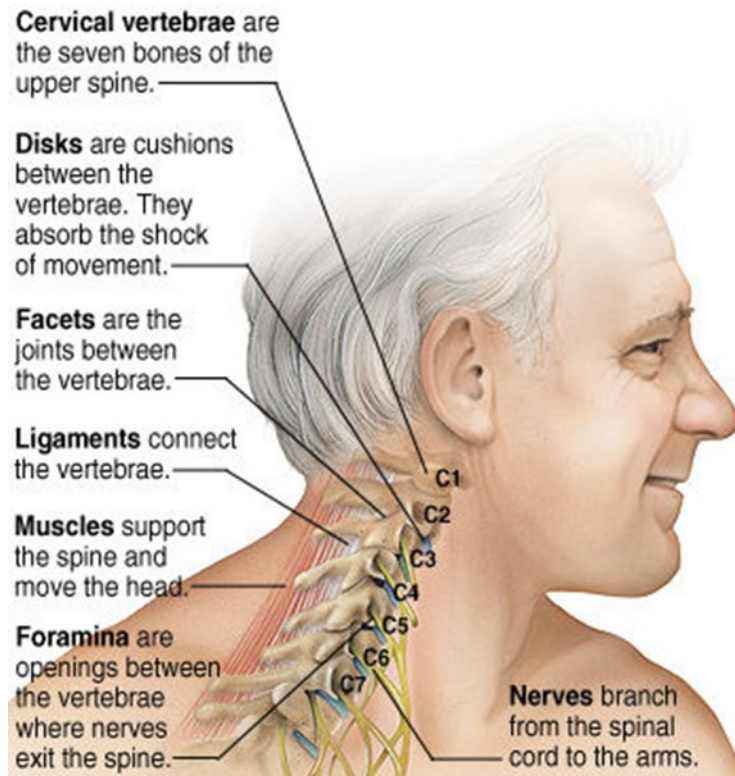


Peter Mc Cormick (ED Physiotherapist)

Altnagevin Emergency Department

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The Neck is also known as The Cervical Spine. The neck is both strong and flexible. It is composed of 7 vertebra (spinal segments) which attach the neck to the rest of the spine. It is able to support the weight of the head and is also able to move in all directions. The neck is supported by a strong network of ligaments and muscles.



Other important advice

AVOID HARM – (Heat, Alcohol, Running or any other vigorous exercise, Massage) in the first 3 days after injury. These can add to inflammation and pain in the early days after injury.

Optimism – remember the majority of patients with neck sprains fully recover. Try to remain positive and try to maintain activity levels. Fear of movement adds to stress and anxiety which can worsen pain levels.

Driving – Do not drive if you do not have sufficient movement at your neck. Driving with significantly restricted neck movements can be dangerous.

Neck Collars – avoid use of neck collars as they can add to neck stiffness and weakness.

Further treatment – if you are not showing improvements by 2-3 weeks you should liaise with your G.P./Chartered Physiotherapist.

Reattending ED – this is suggested if you notice any of the following symptoms worsening neck/shoulder pain and associated neck spasm, visual disturbance, pins and needles or weakness in arms, balance problems, or difficulties with speech/swallow.

Further Information

www.conrod.org.au/cms/resources-and-tools/Whiplash-evidence-based-resource

www.csp.org.uk/publications/neck-pain-exercises

The Whiplash Book. How you can deal with a Whiplash Injury UK edition. 2002 (TSO)

What is a neck sprain?

A neck sprain is the result of a sudden and often unexpected movement of the head into a forward, backwards or sideways direction. Sometimes the neck can be forced into a combination of these. As a result of these sudden and excessive movements the ligaments and muscles which help to support the neck are overstretched.

How do neck sprains occur?

Neck sprains often result from motor vehicle collisions and are often referred to as Whiplash Injuries (Whiplash Associated Disorders). Neck sprains can also occur as a result of a slip or fall causing the head to be jolted. These injuries are also commonly seen following a blow to the head during contact sports such as boxing and rugby.

What are the symptoms of a neck sprain?

There are some similarities between a neck sprain and the symptoms which develop after an ankle sprain. When similar structures are over-stretched at the ankle, the result is inflammation and pain. This is also the case at the neck.

As a result of pain and inflammation, stiffness often develops at the neck. Other symptoms that can occur include headaches, muscle spasm and occasionally dizziness.

Inflammation can take between 6-12 hours to develop after injury. This can explain why only minimal pain is often

reported at the time of injury, but becomes much worse over the course of the next day or two.

Is my neck sprain likely to improve?

The good news is that the majority of patients who sustain a neck sprain make a full recovery. Recovery times after a neck sprain can be variable. In some cases it may take only a few weeks in the case of a minor sprain, while it may take several months to a year in cases of severe sprain.

What can I do to help my own recovery

Ice/Heat- ICE can be useful for pain relief (a bag of frozen peas wrapped in a damp towel) can be applied to the region in the first day after injury. This can be applied for 20 minutes. Heat can be useful in helping to ease stiffness from 3 days after injury. This could take the form of a hot water bottle wrapped in a towel for 20 minutes or a warm shower with particular emphasis on the areas of discomfort.

Medication – painkillers or anti inflammatory medication may be beneficial to assist recovery. Anti inflammatory medication is usually more effective from 3 days after injury. Medication will be discussed by the ED staff or further guidance can be sought from **your G.P. or a pharmacist.**

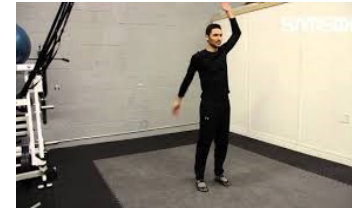
Posture – poor postural patterns especially when sitting can contribute to ongoing neck sprain symptoms. Three important steps to achieving improved neck posture in sitting /standing are 1- allowing your pelvis to raise forward out of a

6- **Shoulder Raise-** simply raise 1 arm at a time above head



Phase 2 Exercises

7- **Opposite Vertical Arm Swings** – one arm swings forward, the other backwards. Add a light weight to progress exercise.



8 -**Lateral arm raises in forward leaning** – leaning forward move arms out to shoulder level . Possibly add a light weight



3-Side-bends -With head in middle try moving ear towards shoulder return to middle and then repeat to other side. **This should be a gentle movement not a forced stretch.**



4- Shoulder Shrugs – draw shoulder towards ears hold X 5 seconds with 30% effort.



5-Shoulder Rolls- try rolling shoulders in a circular motion



slumped position, 2 – gently draw your shoulders towards the centre of your spine, 3 lift the base of your skull off the back of your neck . This should be repeated 3-4 times per hour x held for 10 seconds.



Sitting – avoid prolonged sitting as this tends to increase stiffness and pain at the neck. Regularly move the neck when sitting, adjust your posture (above) and stand up and move at least hourly. If you are watching television try to adopt a “straight on” position to reduce strain on the neck.

Mobile Phones/Tablets – try to avoid prolonged use of these devices with the head in a flexed (bent forward position). By raising the device closer to eye-line less stress will be placed on the neck.

Sleeping –the best sleeping posture is lying on either side or on your back. The basic principle to remember is that your head should be supported in a neutral position. Your pillow

height should match the distance between your ear and the tip of your shoulder.



Try to remain active and continue with normal activities as pain allows. Reduce the strain on the neck by **making small modifications.**

1-if you are lifting try to lighten the load. Regularly alternate the side you are carrying with. With young children this may mean making more use of buggies, allowing them to climb onto your knee rather than lifting them. During nursing or breast-feeding have a pillow on your lap to minimise the strain of holding the baby for prolonged periods.

2- spread out household chores, rotating tasks as opposed to doing the same thing for prolonged periods.

3- sports- you may have to adjust your activity levels or technique e.g. swimming – you may have to adjust your stroke, Cycling – you may have to increase the height of

handle –bars, running – running on grass may be easier than firmer surfaces.

Hairdresser – if you have difficulty putting your head back, try facing the basin.

Exercise – the best evidence for recovery from neck sprain suggests strengthening exercises for the neck and shoulder are most effective. We have included these and some exercises to encourage movement at the neck. **These should be commenced from 1-2 days after injury, and at least 3 times daily with 5 repetitions of each exercise. Start with phase 1 exercises (below) and progress to phase 2 as able.**

Extension and Flexion -Allow head to move backwards until tightness is felt before returning head to middle and moving chin towards chest



Rotations -Trying turning head to one side then return to middle before turning to other side.

