

Physio 4 You

Neck pain

Neck complaints that cause pain or restricted movement can be considered a cervical spine dysfunction, a condition most people experience at some point in their life.



The neck consists of seven vertebrae each with a shock absorbing disc between them, supported by muscles and ligaments. A complex structure, the neck is required to support the weight of your head, which is around 8 per cent of your total body weight, as well as provide enough movement to look at the floor, the ceiling, over each of your shoulders and tilt your head to around 45 degrees on each side.

To complicate matters further, the relative weight of your head against gravity increases approximately 1.5 kilograms for every centimetre it sits forward of your shoulders. This means that if you have a 'forward head posture' which is commonly seen in computer workers, your neck joints will be under more pressure with muscles having to work harder just to hold your head up.

Symptoms

Symptoms of cervical spine dysfunction can include pain with movement, restriction (most commonly rotation) with or without pain, muscular spasm/tightness, headaches, general fatigue and a feeling of having a 'heavy head'. Cervical spine dysfunction can commonly refer pain to the top of the shoulders and between the shoulder blades. Clicking, cracking or grinding within the neck may also be present during cervical spine dysfunction and is indicative of restricted individual joint movement. Neck problems may arise from positional problems such as prolonged poor posture or sleeping 'funny', muscle overactivity from stress and tension, or from traumatic events such as a car accident or sporting injury.

There are some more serious causes of cervical spine dysfunction such as pinched nerves and bulging discs which may cause severe neck pain or pins and needles, numbness and/or weakness in the neck, arms or hands.



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What can you do?

If your neck is sore and you do not have any of the severe symptoms listed above, there are some simple things you can do to relieve discomfort.

Keep moving: Although it may be a little uncomfortable it is important to try to keep your neck moving as much as possible to avoid stiffness, but be sure to stop if you experience any severe pain.

Watch your posture: Be careful to keep your neck in a neutral position during sustained poses such as watching TV, reading or using the computer.

Stretches: Basic neck stretches may reduce muscle tightness.

Heat: A heat pack or hot water bottle on the area for 15-20 minutes at a time can relieve muscle tightness and spasm. Be careful not to burn yourself as gentle warmth is all that is required.

What can physiotherapy do?

Your physiotherapist will perform a thorough physical examination to rule out serious conditions and ascertain whether your cervical spine dysfunction is musculoskeletal in origin. They will explain the cause of the dysfunction, and what treatment will best work for you to resolve the situation.

Treatment will typically include a combination of hands-on therapies. It may include soft tissue massage and gentle joint mobilisations to relieve muscle tightness and spasm to restore normal joint motion as well as an exercise program to stretch, strengthen and activate neck muscles. Your physiotherapist will also address other factors that have contributed to the onset of your neck problem such as poor office workstation set up, sleeping on an incorrect pillow, excessive stress, and working for too long without taking a break. By modifying or eliminating these additional factors, it is less likely that your neck pain will return and you will have strategies to manage your neck pain in the long-term.

Physiotherapists are trained to assess the underlying causes of your injury or condition and provide effective treatment so you can resume your normal lifestyle as soon as possible. Don't put up with pain—if you are suffering from neck pain speak to us today!



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