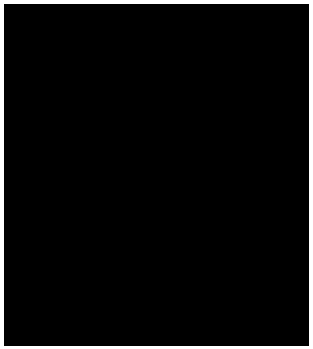
NECK PAIN:

What is inside the neck?

The neck makes up the upper end of the spine which protects the spinal cord and supports the head. The spinal cord is the main nerve which runs from the brain, through the neck and back, distributing nerves to the rest of the body.

The spine is made up of vertebrae which are stacked up on one another to make up a column. There are 7 bones in the neck known as cervical vertebrae; in-between these are intervertebral discs made of cartilage.

Many muscles and ligaments are attached to the spine and spread out across the back and shoulders.



Spinal nerves branch out from the spinal cord through small openings at the side of the spine, travelling through the neck and into the arms. Impulses travel along these nerves, sending sensations such as pain and touch to the brain and messages from the brain to the muscles.

Other causes of neck pain:

Degenerative osteoarthritis: - wear and tear of the joints in the spine which has progressed over time

Sporting injuries:- most commonly seen in rugby, gymnastics and trampolining

Head injuries:- common causes include road traffic accidents, falls and assaults

Trapped nerve:- may be due to a disc bulge causing the nerve to become pinched between the disc and the vertebrae

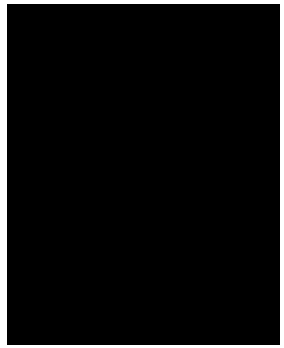
Tension:- stress and prolonged poor postures can lead to tension headaches

Wry neck:- often caused from the neck being held in an uncomfortable position for too long

Croydon Health Services

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICE 2011

WHIPLASH AND NECK PAIN



Whiplash can cause injuries to the neck muscles, nerves and ligaments, resulting from a sudden backwards and forwards movement. It often results from a car crash.

This causes the muscles of the neck to contract strongly to hold the head still and protect the spine.

It is not uncommon for the symptoms to take some time to settle.

What are the symptoms?

- Pain and stiffness in your neck, shoulders, arms or back
- Inability to move your neck properly
- Headaches, dizziness, blurred vision
- Decreased concentration

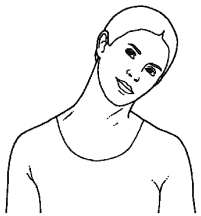
What can I do to help me get better?

- Use a pillow to support your neck whilst sitting
- Take painkillers to reduce discomfort and to allow you to mobilise your neck (Please check the patient information leaflets enclosed with the medication for instructions on dosage)
- Apply an ice pack to the sore area for 5-10 minutes, every hour for the first couple of days, to provide pain relief and relax the muscle spasm.
- Try to stay active, doing as many of your normal activities as possible.
- Stay at work if you can. People who stay at work after an accident recover more quickly than those who take time off.
- Initially avoid heavy lifting
- Gentle massage with baby lotion or pain relieving gel
- Change position regularly and do the exercises shown overleaf

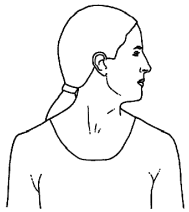
Exercises

It is important to start moving your neck as soon as possible to regain normal movement. It may be painful initially, but will not harm your neck. You should start by exercising **very gently** and gradually build up. The exercises will help to restore movement and flexibility in your neck, and ensure that your muscles are acting to support the neck. These exercises should be done every hour, repeating them 10 times in each direction.

Straighten up; look down and try to touch your chin on your chest.
Now look upwards and try to point your chin towards the ceiling.

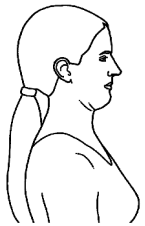


Straighten up; try and touch your ear down to your shoulder. Now repeat to the other side.
Keep your shoulders relaxed, do not allow them to shrug upwards.



Straighten up; turn your head to look over you shoulder. Now look over the other shoulder.

Shrug your shoulders up and down whilst breathing in and out.
Roll your shoulders in a backwards circular movement and then in a forwards circular movement.

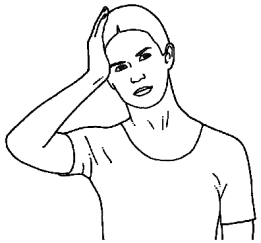


Straighten up; imagine your chin is sitting on a shelf. Gently draw your chin backwards keeping your chin on the shelf. You will feel the tightening of the muscles at the back of your neck.

The following exercises will make the neck muscles work without actually moving the head, helping to reduce both fatigue and pain.

Straighten up. Place your hand on your forehead. Try to bend your head forward whilst resisting the movement with your hand. You will feel the muscles at the front of your neck contracting.

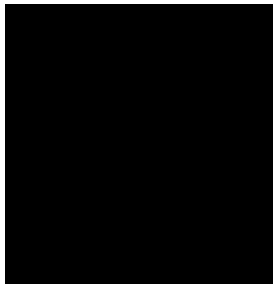
Straighten up. Place your hand on the back of your head. Try to move your head backwards whilst resisting with your hand. You will feel the muscles at the back of your neck contracting.



Straighten up. Place your hand on the side of your head. Try and take your ear towards your shoulder whilst resisting with your hand. You will feel the muscles at the side of your neck contracting. Repeat to the other side.

Posture:

Poor posture in sitting or standing can lead to increased pain and stiffness. It is important to change your position regularly; gently stretch your spine and move your neck in all directions as shown above. Ensure your work station is arranged correctly to avoid strain on your neck.



Sit with hips, knees and elbows at close to 90 degree angles, keeping feet flat on the floor.
Your computer screen should be directly in front of you, slightly below eye level.