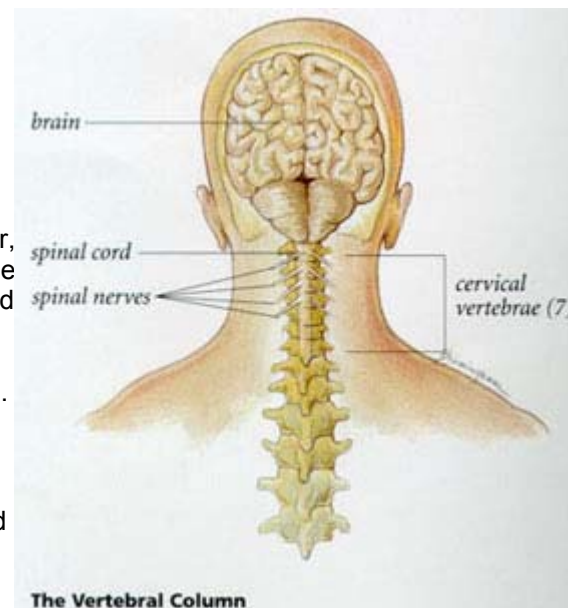


Neck Pain



The neck (cervical spine) is composed of vertebrae which begin in the upper torso and end at the base of the skull. The bony vertebrae along with the ligaments (like thick rubber bands) provide stability to the spine. The muscles allow for support and motion. The neck has a significant amount of motion and supports the weight of the head. However, because it is less protected than the rest of the spine, the neck can be vulnerable to injury and disorders that produce pain and restrict motion. For many people, neck pain is a temporary condition that disappears with time. Others need appropriate diagnosis and treatment to relieve their symptoms.

This page explains some of the causes of and treatment for neck pain. Ask the therapist for more detailed information.



What causes neck pain?

Neck pain may result from abnormalities in the soft tissues - the muscles, ligaments, and nerves - as well as in bones and joints of the spine. The most common causes of neck pain are soft tissue abnormalities due to injury or prolonged wear and tear. In rare cases, infection or tumors may cause neck pain. In some people, neck problems may be the source of pain in the upper back, shoulders or arms.

Myofascial restrictions reach up and into the head and neck area, pulling vertebrae out of alignment, compressing disc spaces and putting abnormal pressures on nerve roots as well as blood vessels. These are all pressure sensitive structures, and hence symptoms result. Muscles brace, stiffen and hold resulting in a vicious cycle of muscle spasm, pain and bracing

Degenerative and inflammatory diseases - Degenerative diseases that cause neck pain include osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. Osteoarthritis usually occurs in older people as a result of wear of the joints between the bones in the neck. Rheumatoid arthritis can cause destruction of the joints of the neck, but usually smaller, more peripheral joints first. Both of these major types of arthritis can cause stiffness and pain.

Cervical disk degeneration also can cause neck pain. The disk acts as a shock absorber between the bones in the neck. In cervical disk degeneration (typically age 40 onwards), the normal gelatin-like center of the disk degenerates and the space between the vertebrae narrows. As the disk space narrows, added stress is applied to the joints of the spine causing further wear and degenerative disease. The cervical disk may also protrude and cause pressure on the spinal cord or nerve roots when the rim of the disk weakens. This is known as a herniated cervical disk.

Injury - Because the neck is so flexible and because it supports the head, it is extremely vulnerable to injury. Motor vehicle or diving accidents, contact sports, and falls may result in neck injury. The regular use of safety belts in motor vehicles can help to prevent or minimize injury. A "rear end" automobile collision may result in hyperextension, a backward motion of the neck beyond normal limits, or hyperflexion, a forward motion of the neck beyond normal limits. Most common injuries are to the soft tissues, i.e., muscles and ligaments. Severe injury with fracture or dislocation of the neck may damage the spinal cord and cause paralysis (quadriplegia).

Much less common causes of neck pain include tumors, infections, or congenital abnormalities of the vertebrae.

When should you seek help?

If severe neck pain occurs following an injury (motor vehicle accident, diving accident, fall), a trained professional, such as a paramedic, should immobilize the patient to avoid the risk of further injury and possible paralysis. Physical Therapy care should be sought as soon as possible. Immediate care should also be sought when an injury causes pain in the neck that radiates down the arms and legs. Radiating pain or numbness in your arms or legs causing weakness in the arms or legs without significant neck pain should also be evaluated.

If there has not been an injury, you should seek Physical Therapy care when neck pain is:

- continuous and persistent
- severe
- accompanied by pain that radiates down the arms or legs
- accompanied by headaches, numbness, tingling, or weakness

Who can treat neck pain?

Many patients seek Physical Therapy care for neck pain, because Physical Therapists are specifically trained in the workings of the musculoskeletal system, including the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of problems involving the muscles, bones, joints, ligaments and tendons. Physical Therapists at Wholistic Physical Therapy treat a wide variety of injuries and other conditions, including neck pain.

Diagnosing neck pain



Determining the source of the pain is essential to recommend the right method of treatment and rehabilitation. Therefore, a comprehensive examination is required to determine the cause of neck pain.

The therapist will take a complete history of the difficulties you are having with your neck. He or She may ask you about other illnesses, any injury that occurred to your neck and any complaints you have associated with neck pain. Previous treatment for your neck condition will also be noted.

Next, He will perform a physical examination. This examination may include evaluation of neck motion, neck tenderness, and the function of the nerves and muscles in your arms and legs.

X-ray and MRI tests that you have had can be brought in to add information to allow us to look closely at the neck. These simple diagnostic techniques often help us to determine the cause of neck pain and to prescribe effective treatment.

Treatment

How neck pain is treated depends on what the diagnosis reveals. However, most patients are treated successfully with myofascial release, spinal mobilization and other highly skilled forms of manual therapy, and exercises. Which therapies are used depends on your specific problem. If indicated the McKenzie Protocol will be used since Scott is trained in this.

When neck pain persists or is chronic, Scott will recommend a rehabilitation program that includes a self treatment and home exercise component to help you relieve your pain and prevent it from coming back. Very few patients require surgery to relieve neck pain. For the vast majority of patients, a combination of rest and physical therapy will relieve neck pain.

Appropriate referrals will be made if necessary to Doctors, massage therapist, Chiropractic or acupuncture professionals whom we have confidence in.