



Polyclinics
SingHealth

Neck Pain



*Disclaimer: Please note that the instructions shown are strictly for general information only.
If you have any queries, kindly check with your healthcare provider.*



SCAN ME



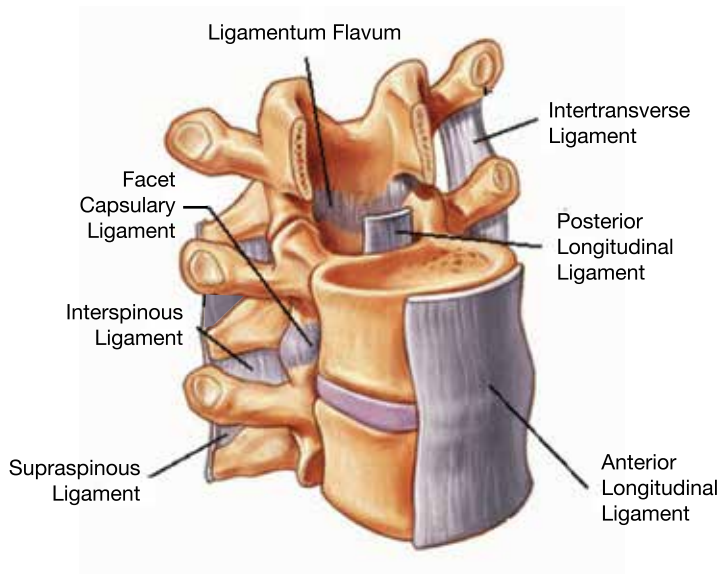
What is neck pain?

Neck pain is a common complaint.

Most cases of neck pain are due to benign conditions. It is uncommon for neck pain to be a symptom of a more serious problem.

Our spine consists of the **vertebral bones** (neck/cervical spine, upper back/thoracic spine, lower back/lumbar spine) and the **intervertebral discs**, held together by strong **ligaments and muscles**.

Injury to these structures (such as sprain or strain) can cause neck pain.





What are the causes for neck pain?

- Prolonged posture that puts a strain on the neck, such as sleeping in an uncomfortable position, or prolonged continuous use of digital devices
- Injury such as a fall or after a motor vehicle accident
- Nerve irritations due to sustained compression



Did you know?

Spondylosis is the term often used to describe the age-related changes found in the spine.

It is common in people above 40 years old, and often have no symptoms!



Why do some people have persistent neck pain?

Chronic pain refers to pain that lasts beyond 3 to 6 months.

Chronic neck pain is usually caused initially by an injury, but the affected area remains very sensitive and painful even though the injury has healed.

It is also associated with other factors such as stress, poor sleep, unhealthy lifestyle, anxiety and depression.

Chronic pain can sometimes have no apparent cause.



What are the signs & symptoms experienced in a person with neck pain?

- Neck pain triggered by neck movements
- Stiffness and restriction of movement
- Muscle tightness and spasms
- If the surrounding nerves are irritated, you may also experience weakness, numbness or tingling in the arm
- Headache, especially over the back of the head, and sometimes giddiness may accompany neck pain



How long does it take to recover?

Acute neck pain usually improves within 1 to 2 weeks. The pain will usually last less than 6 weeks.

Chronic neck pain may last for months, or even years.

Over time, most patients with neck pain can resume their occupational or recreational activities.

Understanding the causes of pain, and setting progressive and realistic functional goals can be helpful for many people with chronic pain.



You should seek medical attention early if you have...

- Severe pain from a traumatic injury e.g., a motor vehicle accident, diving accident or fall
- Severe pain that does not improve with rest or medications
- Pain that is severely affecting your sleep or activities
- Headache, numbness, weakness or tingling
- Swelling, redness or severe pain affecting multiple joints
- Difficulty controlling urination or bowels
- Fever or night sweats
- Unexplained weight loss



Do you need an imaging scan?

Most neck pains do not require any imaging. Your doctor will evaluate your symptoms and may order imaging if necessary.

However, if the neck pain is prolonged or if there is trauma or injury, doctors may sometimes order an X-ray. Further imaging like Computed Tomography (CT) or Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) are only indicated in certain situations.





What are the treatment options?

Depending on the condition, your healthcare provider may recommend:

Medications



- For mild to moderate pain: take paracetamol or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) e.g. ibuprofen
- For moderate to intense pain: may require prescription painkillers by your doctor

Physiotherapy



- Keep active. Exercise may be difficult at first if the pain is intense. You should start gentle exercises as soon as you can because this will help with faster recovery
- Appropriate exercise programme can ease pain and regain your normal function
- Physical modalities help to relieve your pain and promote recovery. For example, electrotherapy or transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS), where electrodes are placed on your skin near the painful area at the neck to deliver tiny electrical impulses that help relieve pain

Activity modifications



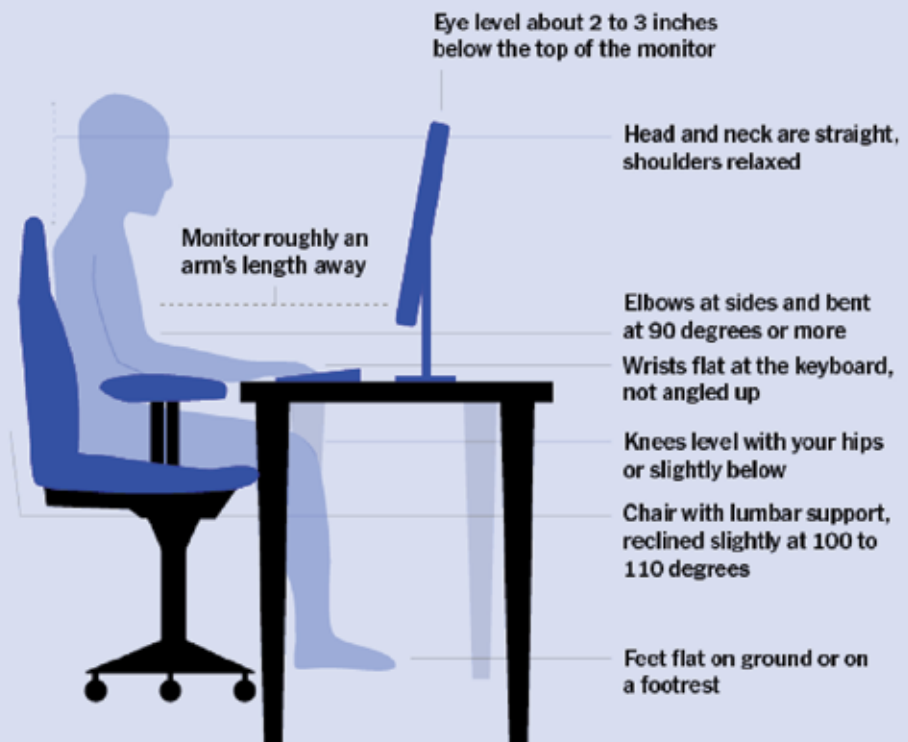
- Avoid prolonged bed rest and start usual activities as soon as you can
- Improve work ergonomics to reduce strain at your neck. Make sure you move and stretch for 2-3 minutes after every 20-30 minutes of sitting

Specialists referral



- Most cases of neck pain are not due to serious causes, and do not need specialist treatment
- Your doctor will refer you to see a specialist only when necessary for further investigation and treatment such as surgery

Ergonomic workstation setup





Chronic pain requires additional and multi-pronged approach

- Chronic pain can significantly affect one's social well-being and mental health. Your doctor may refer you to a counsellor or psychologist
- Relaxation and behavioral therapy can help address psychological and social factors that are associated with chronic pain
- It is also important to adopt lifestyle changes and good habits that can ease chronic pain like:



Getting enough
sleep



Exercise



Stop smoking



Good nutrition
intake

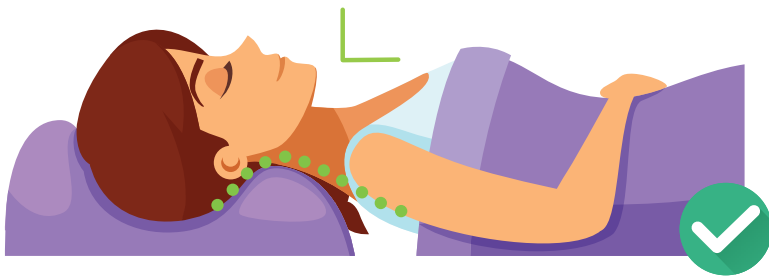


Weight loss if
overweight or obese



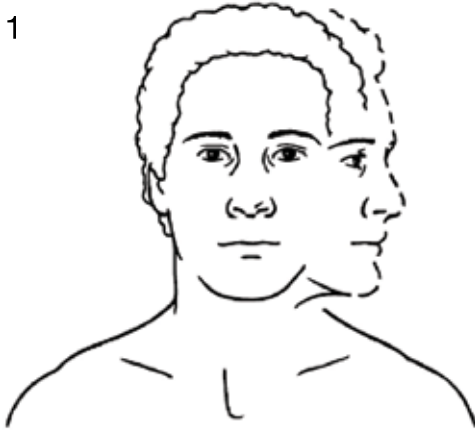
Practical tips to prevent neck pain:

- During long commute or prolonged screen exposure, take breaks and move around and stretch your neck and shoulders for 2-3 minutes every 20-30 minutes
- Strengthen the neck and back muscles
- Improve flexibility of the neck and shoulder muscles
- Have a comfortable work station and ergonomics
- Avoid overuse or overstrain of your neck, such as tucking the phone between your ear and shoulder when you talk, or carrying heavy bags with straps over your neck and shoulder
- Smoking can put you at higher risk of developing neck pain. You are advised to quit smoking
- Sleep in a relaxed position. Your head and neck should be comfortably aligned with your body

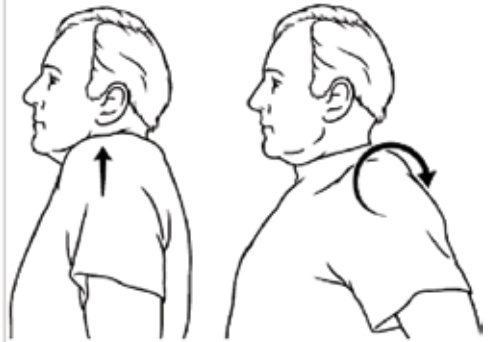


Simple home exercises:

1



2



3



You may perform these exercises
2-3 times a day:

1. Gentle neck rotations: **10 repetitions**
2. Shoulder rolls: **10 repetitions**
3. Neck stretching: **Hold 30 seconds, 3 repetitions**

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