



Neck pain

A patient's guide



At home

When watching television make sure the screen is straight ahead of you so you can hold your head in a neutral position.

When reading or knitting, for example, avoid bending your head for long periods. Rest your arms on pillows for support or sit at a table.

Try to regularly change positions every 20-30 minutes.

At work

It is important that you maintain as good a posture as possible. For example if you work at a desk you should sit with a support in your lower back and sit well under the work surface. Ensure the desk is at the correct height for you (approximately at elbow height).

When using a computer, ensure your wrists and hands are in a relaxed position. Make sure your computer screen is at eye level and straight in front of you. Try to have an organised work station so that you are not having to reach for things.

When using the telephone, never hold it between your neck and shoulder as this will overstrain your neck.

References

www.msk.cambscommunityservices.nhs.uk

More information

For up to date contact information or further advice including self help videos please visit our website: www.whittington.nhs.uk/msk

Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern please contact our PALS team on 020 7288 5551 or whh-tr.whitthealthPALS@nhs.net

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet please contact us on 020 7288 3182. We will try our best to meet your needs.

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What is neck pain?

Neck pain is very common. More than half of all people develop neck pain at some time in their life. Neck pain can occur at any age but is more common as you get older. You may have pain when you wake up or it can start following an accident. Sometimes, it comes on gradually for no apparent reason.

As more people spend their working day at a computer or sat in an office, the neck and shoulder muscles can become stiff or overused.

Other factors such as stress and tiredness can contribute to on-going neck pain as can osteoarthritis (age-related wear and tear) in the neck. This can, in turn, cause not only muscular pain from the neck into the shoulder but also some stiffness in moving the neck.

You may have some or all of the following symptoms:

- pain in the neck which may move into the shoulder,
- stiffness on turning you head and
- headaches.

Pain relief

It is important to take any medication prescribed by your GP on a regular basis.

Use a wheat pack heated in the microwave or a hot water bottle wrapped in a towel. Place the heat around your neck and shoulders for 10 to 15 minutes as often as you like during the day. Try to relax sitting or lying down, while you place the heat on.

Avoid the use of hot packs if you are unable to detect the difference between hot and cold over the affected area.

Be careful not to have the hot pack too hot as it is easy to get burnt.

Posture

You can help reduce your neck pain by improving your posture and keeping the mobility in the joints.

It is important to maintain a good posture at all times.

Standing

Pull in your lower stomach muscles and stand straight with your shoulders back and chin tucked in.

Sitting

Sit on an upright supportive chair rather than a soft sofa.

Sit well back in the chair and place a rolled up towel in the small of your back. Make sure your shoulders are in line with your hips and that your chin is not poking forwards. Sitting correctly reduces the strain on muscles and ligaments.

Exercises

It is important to exercise your neck in order to keep the joints mobile and the muscles flexible.

Four times a day move your neck through its full pain free range forwards, backwards and turning to the left and the right. Do this five - ten times.

Do not push into pain and stop if you feel dizzy.

Sleeping

Sleep on a supportive mattress, never sleep on your front as this strains your neck. Often people with neck pain find it beneficial to place a small sized towel rolled up lengthways inside the pillowcase.

If you sleep on your side, try to make sure your head and neck are straight and in line with the rest of your spine. This may require one or two pillows depending on the thickness and firmness. It is better to keep the arm you are lying on in front of your chest.