

What a pain in the Neck

– FREEDOM from Neck Pain

By James Bone

Have you ever woken up with a stiff sore neck and you can't turn it properly to one side?
OR you are working at the computer or driving and you feel your neck getting more and more stiff?

OR you turn your head quickly and suddenly you get severe pain, where you can't move?
These are just a few example of how neck pain can hit you.

Neck pain can be anything from annoying to out right debilitating. It can lead to headache, pain to your shoulders or down your arms. It can be associated with numbness or pins and needles in your arms, or other areas. It can make your head feel fuzzy, you can feel dizzy, and even nauseated, with neck pain.

Neck pain is a common problem and though it can feel awful, more often than not it may not necessarily be a serious problem, and it is something that you can work on to prevent.

So what are the causes of neck pain?

Neck pain may be due to:

- Injury, such as a whiplash injury
- Degeneration such as disc or arthritis
- Disease such as inflammatory arthritis
- Acute Problem such as acute torticollis – where you wake up with a stiff painful neck

However, more commonly the problem is related to posture, stress, and tension, leading to problems such as muscle spasm, painful trigger points, joint or nerve compression, inflammation, tissue ischaemia due to restricted blood supply, which can lead to various symptoms of pain, stiffness, pins and needles, numbness, aching, etc.

If severe, these problems may require assistance from a physiotherapist or health practitioner, to help start the healing process. If mild you may be able to reduce the problem through the preventative measures suggested below. *Remember this article is for education purposes, not for treatment or diagnosis, so if you have concerns see your health practitioner.*

When Neck Pain may need URGENT medical care –

- If you have received recent trauma
- You have a very stiff neck, where you can't bring your chin toward your chest, have fever and are unwell – could be meningitis or infection
- You have severe neurological symptoms, such as numbness, weakness, loss of bowel or bladder control
- You have severe night pain, have unexplained weight loss, history of cancer

Then you should see your doctor straight away.

About the Neck

The neck is made up of 7 small vertebrae, which support the weight of the head. The neck is the most mobile part of the spine. The neck called the cervical spine, forms the top part of the spine, and has a natural inward curve called a lordosis. Movement of any part of the spine will affect the position of the neck.

Try this - While sitting rock your pelvis backward, slumping your spine, and notice what happens to your head and neck – the chin pokes out more! Now rock your pelvis forward and see how your head and neck straightens up again.

So be mindful that to correct neck posture you need to correct your whole posture. To do this sit or stand with your lower back with a neutral inward curve. Lengthen upward through your spine. Soften your chest. Lower your shoulder blades. Nod your chin inward like saying 'yes', while lifting tall through your crown. **AVOID** pushing your head back. Good posture should feel relaxed and mobile – not stiff.

There is a muscle called the upper trapezius, which attaches to the base of the skull, neck and tops of the shoulder blade. This is a common muscle where we can hold tension due to stress, worry or habit. Tension can lead to neck pain and compression.

To release tension – raise up your shoulders to count of 3, then exhale with a long slow out breath, allowing your shoulders to drop from your ears, then gently stretch your head from side to side.

Another great release that can help is to gently (do baby moves only) turn your head and shoulders in opposite direction to each other. Do this for about a minute and feel how your neck tension eases.

The body and your muscles need to move – if you sit too long, do the same thing to long or hold your muscles tense for too long – they will begin to hurt.

The solution is simple – get up and move frequently – walk, stretch, do some yoga, breathe.....

Also remember to keep yourself active generally, such as brisk walking - at least 30 minutes 5 days per week.

The neck is ruled by the eyes - where the eyes go the head and neck tends to follow. Be careful not to let your chin poke forward, when focusing too intently on your work.

Relax your eyes and correct your posture, as described above.

Anatomically there are key stress points which can lead to neck pain:

- Upper neck called suboccipital, where the neck joins the base of the skull. This can become very tight with the chin poking posture.

- Lower neck, where it joins the stiffer thoracic spine, can also lead to pain if it is relative too stiff.

There are 2 key groups of muscle, which can help reduce stress to these key points. They are the deep postural muscles called the Deep Neck Flexors (DNF) and Deep Neck Extensors. You use the DNF, when you nod your head like saying “yes”. You use the DNE to keep your lower neck extended as you do this. Keeping these muscles healthy is one of the keys to reducing neck compression, which can lead to pain or degeneration.

***Nod your chin** like saying “yes” gently, keeping crown lifted tall – repeat 5 to 10 times.*

Try these two simple yoga exercises – yoga is holistic way to deal with your neck pain. CARE – avoid pain and strain, stop if they worsen your problem, and seek advice from your yoga teacher on how to do them properly.

***Wind Relieve Posture** – lie on your back with left knee bent to your chest, right leg straight.*

Extend out through your right heel, lengthen up through your crown inhaling. As you exhale draw in your belly and nod your chin like saying “yes”. Don’t lift your head. Repeat for 3 to 10 breaths.

***Snake Posture** – lie on your belly, head forward, always keeping your chin noddled inward. Legs are long. Inhale, draw your shoulder blades back and down and raise head and shoulders upward, like a curling up snake – focus on lower neck. Exhale, lower down. Repeat 3 to 10 breaths.*

There are many special nerves around the neck, which are also associated with the head and autonomic nervous system, which is why neck problems can lead to dizziness, headiness, nausea, vomiting, and even blood pressure and heart changes.

So working on your neck may help relieve many other symptoms – seek guidance from your health practitioner about this.

Interestingly in the past we have often blamed neck pain to purely postural and structural causes, but growing research, especially in teenagers and younger people is finding a strong association between neck pain and stress and depression, including having major life event changes. This makes some sense since pain is something the brain creates when it sees the body under threat and needs protecting, whether real or imagined.

*So **seek help** to deal with your stress and emotions if needed.*

Research also found that neck pain was more likely to occur in people who failed to relax and turn off after working.

*Include some **daily** relaxation and meditation in your lifestyle.*

What else can you do

Drink enough water – dehydration may contribute to neck pain.

Check your sleep position and pillow– especially if you have morning neck pain.

When to get help – you may have specific problems or muscle imbalances, which need help, especially if the above corrections don't help. Bowen, Physiotherapy, Yoga Therapy, can be invaluable tools to help resolve your neck problems. Call James for an assessment and program, specific to your needs.

References

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Neck Pain www.mayoclinic.com