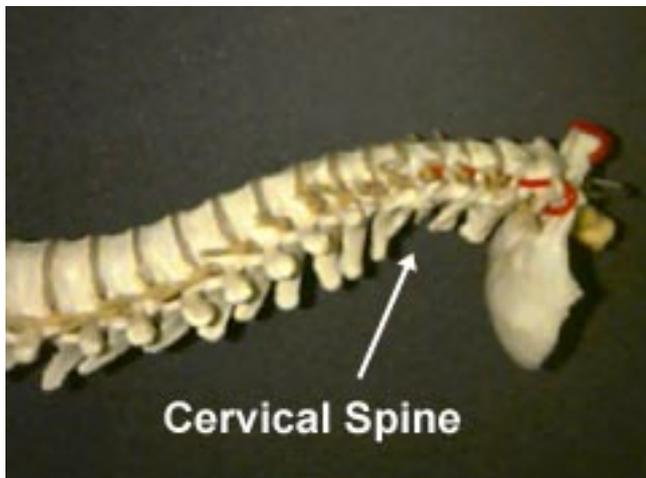


Neck Pain

Neck pain is a very common occurrence, and for some it is an everyday experience. Many of the symptoms felt can be prevented, decreased, or even eliminated through proper stretching, strengthening, and alignment of the cervical spine.

The cervical spine has a "C" shaped curve which opens in the back.



Some causes or types of neck pain include:

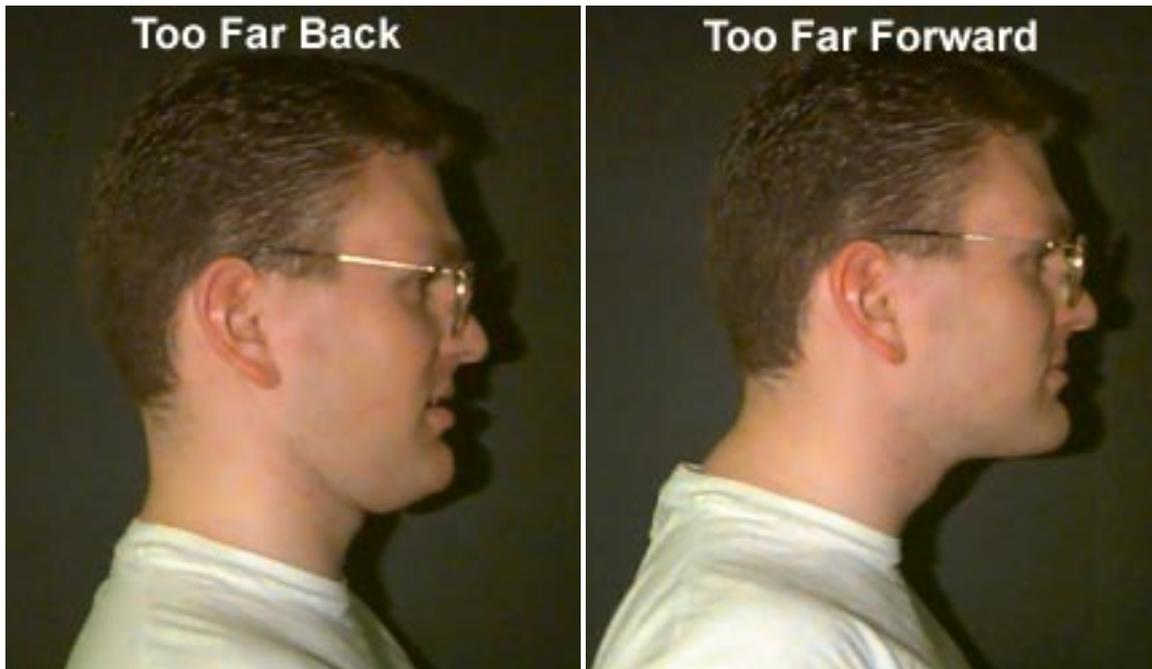
01. Muscular: tightness or spasm in the muscles in, and around your neck - rhomboids, trapezius, scalenes, as well as the erector spinae groups.

02. Facet joints: each pair of vertebrae has 2 facet joints which allow for motion to occur between them. Nerve roots sprout between these facets. Pain can occur when these facets rub or grind together. Osteophytes can also develop within the facet and encroach onto the nerve.

03. Intervertebral disk: between the vertebrae are disks made of fibrocartilage. They absorb the shock from walking, running, jumping, turning, and twisting. Sometimes these disks protrude out of their normal space, and can cause pain by putting pressure on nerves or the spinal cord.

04. Ligaments: another structure which keeps the vertebrae in place are ligaments. Extreme acceleration and then deceleration of the neck can cause a whiplash injury, thus leading to injury to these ligaments and a resulting pain. Another result of a whiplash injury could be a strain or sprain of the muscles surrounding and supporting the cervical spine, also leading to pain.

05. Posture: having your head rest too far forward can cause the "C" shaped curve in your neck to decrease, and keeping your head too far back can accentuate it. These positions can increase the amount of stress placed on the muscles, ligaments, facets, and disks in and around your neck. This undue stress can cause you to feel pain in your neck.



Self Treatments -- Stretching/Strengthening

If by any chance you are currently experiencing neck pain with a resultant numbness in your chest, shoulder, or arm, please do not attempt any of the exercises or techniques listed below. Instead, contact your physician for a proper evaluation. It is better to be safe than sorry!!

Primary Treatment:

01. Heat: take a nice hot shower and let the water run on your neck. Or place a heating pad or hot water bottle on your neck. Keep it on long enough to allow your skin to turn a little red and warm up.
02. Medicine: try an over the counter anti-inflammatory drug. Follow the instructions on the package, and stick with it for a couple of days.
03. Rest: try to avoid movements which aggravate your symptoms.
04. Pillows: try an orthopedic pillow if you normally sleep with more than one pillow. Sleeping with too many pillows can cause an increased amount of stress placed on the muscles, ligaments and facets which can cause neck pain. The pillow will keep the curve in your spine in its proper position while you sleep, and hopefully help with your pain.

Bad Sleeping Position

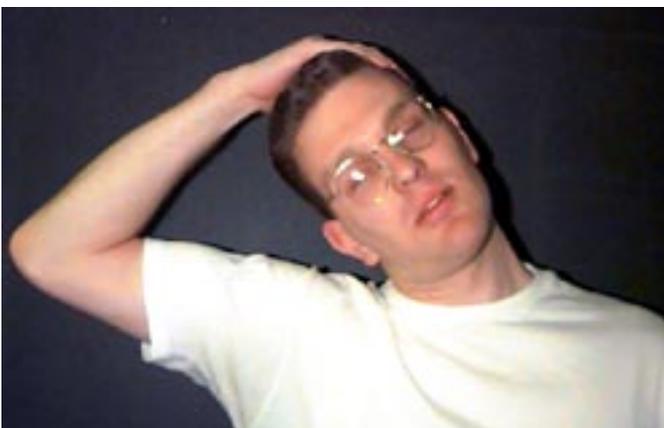


Proper Sleeping Position



Stretching:

Let your neck bend to the side, and with your hand apply a little pressure to your head to help bring it into the same direction. Go until you feel a nice stretch and hold it for 6 seconds. Do this three times and repeat with the opposite side.



Let your head hang forward, as if you are touching your chin to your chest. Lace your fingers behind your head to apply a little pressure to bring your chin further down. Stop when you feel a good stretch and hold for 6 seconds. Do this three times.

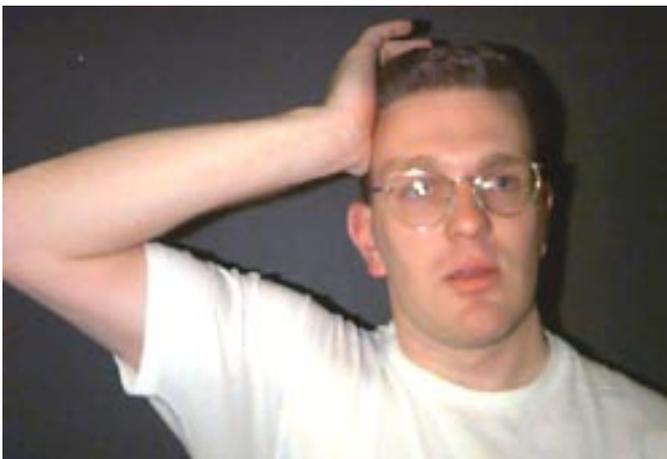


With your shoulders relaxed, turn your head to side as if you were looking over your shoulder. Go until you feel a stretch and hold it there for 6 seconds. Do this three times and repeat with the opposite side.



Strengthening:

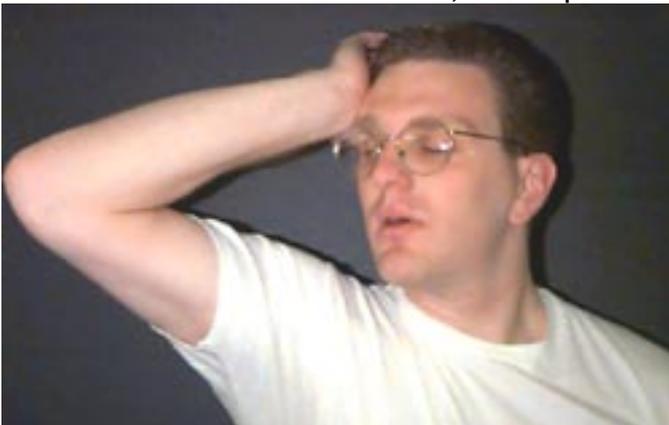
Place one hand on the side of your head, and hold it there. Press your head into your hand, trying to bend it to the side, but don't let your head move. Hold that contraction for 10 seconds. Do this three times, and repeat with the opposite side.



Place both of your hands on your forehead. Push your head into your hands, again not letting it move, and hold the contraction for 10 seconds. Do this three times, and repeat with the opposite side.



Place one hand onto the side of your head, and hold it there. Turn your head into your hand as if you were going to look over your shoulder, only don't let your head move. Hold this contraction for 10 seconds. Do this three times, and repeat with the opposite side.



Stand with your back flat against a wall. Tuck your chin and press your head into the wall, and hold for 10 seconds. Repeat this three times.

