

Neck Injury

Patient information

You have been given this information leaflet because you have been diagnosed with a neck injury.

A neck sprain occurs when your head is suddenly jolted backwards and forwards, or is forcibly rotated. This can cause some neck muscles and ligaments to stretch more than normal, causing a sprain. The pain and stiffness often become worse on the day after the accident. In about half of cases, the pain first develops the day after the accident.

As well as neck pain and stiffness, a sprain can cause the following:

- Tenderness in the neck muscles.
- Reduced and painful neck movements.
- Headaches.
- Pain and stiffness that may progress to involve the upper and lower back.

Treating a Neck Injury

Neck sprains can be treated with simple pain relief and exercises to regain the movement.

- Avoid wearing a neck collar – there is no evidence to suggest it will help to heal your neck, and it's generally better to keep your neck mobile.
- Avoid driving if you find it difficult to turn your head – this may prevent you being able to view traffic.
- Avoid sleeping on your front, and make sure your head is in line with your body (not tilted to the side) if you sleep on your side.
- Only use enough pillows (usually only one) to keep your head level with your body.

Active exercise for pain reduction should be started within 4 days of injury.

The following may help:

- **Neck tilt:** Tilt your head down to rest your chin on your chest. Gently tense your neck muscles and hold for 5 seconds. Return to a neutral position and repeat 5 times.
- **Neck turn:** Turn your head towards one side, keeping your chin at the same height and moving within comfortable limits. Gently tense your neck muscles and hold for 5 seconds. Return your head to the centre and repeat on the opposite side. Repeat 5 times on each side.

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Recovering from a Neck Injury

The pain and stiffness usually gets better after a few days, but may last for a few weeks.

Seek further medical advice if you develop other symptoms such as:

- Loss of feeling (numbness).
- Weakness.
- Persistent pins and needles in part of an arm or hand.

Treating Pain

If needed, painkiller options include the following:

Paracetamol is usually recommended for painful sprains or strains.

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) relieve pain and may also limit inflammation and swelling. You can buy some types (eg, ibuprofen) at pharmacies, without a prescription either topically as a cream, or as tablets. You should check the medication advice leaflet to ensure you are safe to take these i.e some patients with asthma or stomach ulcers may not be able to.

If this does not help, you may need an additional stronger painkiller – such as codeine – you should discuss this with your pharmacist or GP.

Further Information

For further advice and information about your condition:

Please choose from the following:

- 'NHS Patient Choices' website: www.nhs.uk
- 'Making Lives Better' patient website: www.patient.info
- Telephone NHS 111
- Contact your General Practitioner

Contact details:

- The James Cook University Hospital: 01642 850850
Marton Road, Middlesbrough, TS4 3BW
 - The Friarage: 01609 779911
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- Redcar Primary Care Hospital: 01642 511000
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Version 1, Issue Date: October 2018, Revision Date: October 2020