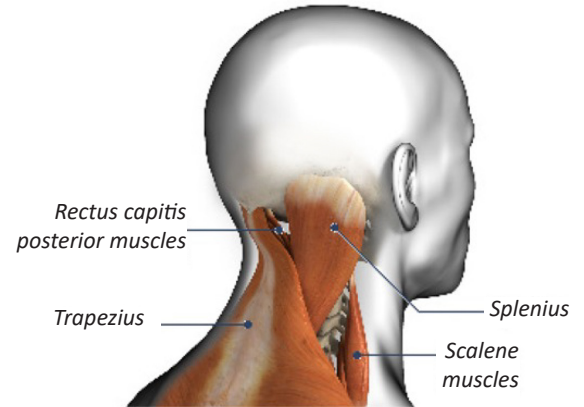


Neck pain is a common problem, yet often, the exact cause for the pain is unclear. In most cases, it is not due to a serious disease or neck problem, and the pain usually improves in 4 to 6 weeks with simple exercises and self-care.

How the neck works

Your head is connected to your neck and upper back by many muscles that attach to the skull. These muscles help to support and move your head.



Muscles of the Neck

What neck pain feels like

You may feel pain in your neck, shoulders, or at the base of your skull. If a nerve in your neck is irritated, you may feel a tingling sensation in your arm or hand. Difficulty moving your neck is fairly common. You may find that moving your neck worsens the pain.

Causes of neck pain

Most neck pain results from irritation or injury to one or more of the muscles, joints, or nerves of the neck. This irritation is most commonly caused by:

- Poor posture while sitting at your desk or computer, or while reading or driving
- Sleeping in a poor position
- Looking up or down repeatedly while completing tasks
- Changes in neck alignment due to eye wear
- Stressful work or home situations that increase the tension in the neck muscles
- Changes in joints and discs over time due to natural wear and tear

Managing neck pain

There are many things you can do at home to reduce your neck pain and prevent it from happening again:

Medications

If your healthcare provider gave you a prescription for pain medication, take it exactly as directed. Contact your healthcare provider if you have questions.

Heat & cold modalities

Place a cold pack or heat pack on your neck for 10–15 minutes every 2 to 3 hours to help ease the pain in your neck. Be sure to place the ice in a thin cloth layer before applying it to your skin.

Walking

Be active every day and make a goal of walking a total of 30 minutes per day. Start with shorter walks several times a day and practice good posture while you walk by standing up straight.

Change positions frequently

Avoid holding your neck still or keeping it in one position. Set a time to remind yourself to take a break and change positions every 30 minutes. Avoid rolling your head around and making quick head movements.

Maintain good posture

Practice good posture habits in the office, during rest, and in your day to day activities. Healthy posture is one of the best tools you have for improving your long-term health.

- Keep your computer monitor at eye level and your head level at all times
- Use a chair with back support.
- Avoid tilting your head to hold a phone between your ear and shoulder. When texting, try to keep your phone screen at eye level to avoid bending your neck.
- While sleeping on your back, do not sleep with more pillows than necessary. Support the curve of your neck by placing a small towel roll inside the pillow case at its base.



Healthy sleeping posture

Healthy desk posture

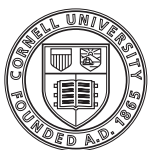
Cornell Health
Physical Therapy

Appointments:
for students, staff
& faculty M, T, W, F

Address:
521 Campus Road
(Schoellkopf Hall)

Phone:
607-255-7217

Web:
health.cornell.edu/PT



Your care

Consult with your healthcare provider if you experience an increase in your symptoms with recommended exercises, or if you develop new symptoms or numbness, tingling, or a spreading of the pain.

Students should consult with a Cornell Health provider. Appointments can be made online at myCornellHealth or by calling 607-255-5155.

Exercises

The following exercises should help to decrease your neck pain. However, if your pain is made worse, contact your clinician. Note: it is best to do the exercises on a firm surface.

SEATED cervical retraction:

(Strive for 10 reps, 3x a day, for 5 days)

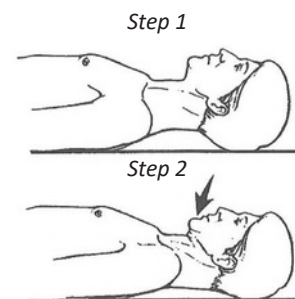
- **Set-up:** Begin sitting in an upright position with your feet flat on the floor.
- **Movement:** Gently draw your chin in, while keeping your eyes fixed on something in front of you.
- **Tip:** Make sure that you do not look down as you do this exercise, or bend your neck forward.



SUPINE cervical retraction:

(Strive for 10 reps, 3x a day, for 5 days)

- **Set-up:** Begin lying on your back with your neck relaxed.
- **Movement:** Gently tuck your chin directly backward as if you are making a double chin. Hold for a count of two, then relax and repeat.
- **Tip:** Make sure that you do not lift your head from the ground.



Much of the text & many of the images found in this fact sheet were adapted from MedBridgeGO