Neck Strain: Care Instructions

Your Care Instructions

You have strained the muscles and ligaments in your neck. A sudden, awkward movement can strain the neck. This often occurs with falls or car accidents or during certain sports. Everyday activities like working on a computer or sleeping can also cause neck strain if they force you to hold your neck in an awkward position for a long time.

It is common for neck pain to get worse for a day or two after an injury, but it should start to feel better after that. You may have more pain and stiffness for several days before it gets better. This is expected. It may take a few weeks or longer for it to heal completely. Good home treatment can help you get better faster and avoid future neck problems.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- If you were given a neck brace (cervical collar) to limit neck motion, wear it as instructed for as many days as your doctor tells you to. Do not wear it longer than you were told to. Wearing a brace for too long can make neck stiffness worse and weaken the neck muscles.
- You can try using heat or ice to see if it helps.
    - Try using a heating pad on a low or medium setting for 15 to 20 minutes every 2 to 3 hours. Try a warm shower in place of one session with the heating pad. You can also buy single-use heat wraps that last up to 8 hours.
    - You can also try an ice pack for 10 to 15 minutes every 2 to 3 hours.
- Take pain medicines exactly as directed.
    - If the doctor gave you a prescription medicine for pain, take it as prescribed.

    - If you are not taking a prescription pain medicine, ask your doctor if you can take an over-the-counter medicine.

- Gently rub the area to relieve pain and help with blood flow. Do not massage the area if it hurts to do so.
- Do not do anything that makes the pain worse. Take it easy for a couple of days. You can do your usual activities if they do not hurt your neck or put it at risk for more stress or injury.
- Try sleeping on a special neck pillow. Place it under your neck, not under your head. Placing a tightly rolled-up towel under your neck while you sleep will also work. If you use a neck pillow or rolled towel, do not use your regular pillow at the same time.
- To prevent future neck pain, do exercises to stretch and strengthen your neck and back. Learn how to use good posture, safe lifting techniques, and proper body mechanics.

When should you call for help?

Call 911 anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You are unable to move an arm or a leg at all.

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- You have new or worse symptoms in your arms, legs, chest, belly, or buttocks. Symptoms may include:
    - Numbness or tingling.
    - Weakness.
    - Pain.
- You lose bladder or bowel control.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You are not getting better as expected.

Where can you learn more?

Go to https://www.healthwise.net/patiented

Enter **M253** in the search box to learn more about **"Neck Strain: Care Instructions".**

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