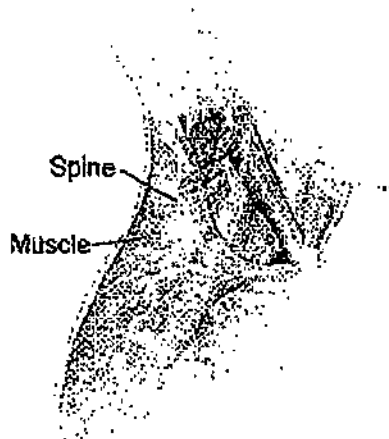


Understanding Cervical Strain



There are 7 bones (vertebrae) in the neck that are part of the spine. These are called the cervical spine. Cervical strain is a medical term for neck pain. The neck has several layers of muscles. These are connected with tendons to the cervical spine and other bones. Neck pain is often the result of injury to these muscles and tendons.

Causes of cervical strain

Different types of stress on the neck can damage muscles and tendons (soft tissues) and cause cervical strain. Cervical tissues can be damaged by:

- The neck being forced past its normal range of motion, such as in a car accident or sports injury
- Constant, low-level stress, such as from poor posture or a poorly set-up workspace

Symptoms of cervical strain

These may include:

- Neck pain or stiffness
- Pain in the shoulders or upper back
- Muscle spasms
- Headache, often starting at the base of the neck
- Irritability, difficulty concentrating, or sleeplessness

Treatment for cervical strain

This problem often gets better on its own. Treatments aim to reduce pain and inflammation and increase the range of motion of the neck. Possible treatments include:

- Over-the-counter or prescription pain medicine. These help relieve pain and inflammation.
- Stretching exercises to decrease neck stiffness.
- Massage to decrease neck stiffness.
- Cold or heat pack. These help reduce pain and swelling.

Call 911

Call 911 right away if you have any of these:

- Face drooping or numbness
- Numbness or weakness, especially in the arms or on one side
- Slurred speech or difficulty speaking
- Blurred vision

When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider right away if you have any of these:

- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as directed
- Pain or stiffness that gets worse
- Symptoms that don't get better, or get worse
- Numbness, tingling, weakness or shooting pains into the arms or legs
- New symptoms

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Pinched Nerve in the Neck

A pinched nerve in the neck (cervical radiculopathy) is caused when the nerve that goes from the spinal cord to the arm is irritated or has pressure on it. This may be caused by a bulging spinal disk. A spinal disk is the cushion between each spinal bone. Or it may be caused by a narrowing of the spinal joint because of arthritis.



A pinched nerve can cause numbness, tingling, deep aching, or electrical shooting pain from the side of the neck all the way down to the fingers on one side.

A pinched nerve may begin after a sudden turning or bending force (such as in a car accident) or after a simple awkward movement. In either case, muscle spasm is commonly present and adds to the pain.

Home care

Follow these guidelines when caring for yourself at home:

- Rest and relax the muscles. Use a comfortable pillow that supports your head and keeps your spine in a natural (neutral) position. Your head shouldn't be tilted forward or backward. A rolled-up towel may help for a custom fit. When standing or sitting, keep your neck in line with your body. Keep your head up and shoulders down. Stay away from activities that require you to move your neck a lot.
- You can use heat and massage to help ease the pain. Take a hot shower or bath, or use a heating pad. You can also use a cold pack for relief. You can make a cold pack by wrapping a plastic bag of crushed or cubed ice in a thin towel. Try both heat and cold, and use the method that feels best. Do this for 20 minutes several times a day.
- You may use acetaminophen or ibuprofen to control pain, unless another pain medicine was prescribed. If you have chronic liver or kidney disease, talk with your health care provider before using these medicines. Also talk with your provider if you've had a stomach ulcer or GI bleeding.
- Reduce stress. Stress can make it longer for your pain to go away.
- Do any exercises or stretches that were given to you as part of your discharge plan.
- Wear a soft collar, if prescribed.
- You may need surgery for a more serious injury.

Follow-up care

Follow up with your health care provider, or as advised, if you don't start to get better after 1 week. You may need more tests. Tell your provider about any fever, chills, or weight loss.

If X-rays were taken, a radiologist will look at them. You will be told of any new findings that may affect your care.

When to seek medical advice

Call your health care provider right away if any of these occur:

- Pain becomes worse even after taking prescribed pain medicine
- Weakness in the arm
- Numbness in the arm gets worse
- Trouble breathing or swallowing

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