

Neck Pain and Neck Injury

This article will help you to identify some of the most common causes of neck pain with tips to help prevent and resolve these potentially disabling conditions.

Neck pain may begin in any of the structures in the neck. These include muscles and nerves as well as spinal vertebrae and the cushioning discs in between. Neck pain may also come from regions near the neck, like the shoulder, jaw, head, and upper arms.



When your neck is sore, you may have difficulty moving it, especially to one side. Many people describe this as having a stiff neck.

If neck pain involves nerves (for example, significant muscle spasm pinching on a nerve or a slipped disk pressing on a nerve), you may feel numbness, tingling, or weakness in your arm, hand, or elsewhere.

Common Causes

Muscle Spasm

Spasms are tight, contracted muscles. Most people in our modern society have them, as we all experience stress in various forms. Sitting at a computer for long periods of time, as well as a lack of a balanced strength and stretch exercise program can produce spasm in the neck muscles. Neck spasms may also be the result of injury, overuse, and postural problems.

In addition to causing acute local, pain, spasmed muscles can reduce normal ranges of movement, cause misalignment of spinal vertebrae, and result in biomechanical imbalances. Getting at the source of the spasm is important, and resolving the imbalance must be accomplished promptly to prevent permanent effects.

Muscle Strain

Muscle strain is a tear in the small muscle fibers that slide over one another during movement to produce contraction. Sometimes this tear can be microscopic, or can cause bleeding or overstretched fibers. Muscle strains are caused by:

- Overuse*

- *A sudden and strong usage including whiplash and contact sports*
- *Too much tension (for example, lifting heavy weights)*

Symptoms include:

- *pain*
- *neck stiffness*
- *headache*
- *dizziness*
- *burning or pins-and-needles*

Patients are most commonly concerned with pain following muscle injury and generally believe that trouble is over once the pain remits. For the most part this is when therapy is most important. Conservative physical therapy is excellent at reducing inflammation and decreasing pain quickly and effectively. In order to encourage normal healing, and prevent weak, inelastic scar tissue from forming, the therapist must work more diligently once the acute pain has lessened. Waiting for an injury to heal on its own, or discontinuing therapy once the acute pain remits can be a mistake and may lead to a more permanent situation.

Stinger

A stinger is an injury that affects the nerves in the neck and arms. It happens when the neck is suddenly forced to rotate or tilt excessively. Impact can also cause a stinger. You will know if you have a stinger if you feel burning or stinging in the area of the neck, shoulders and/or arms. Contact sports such as football often cause injuries resulting in stingers.

Cervical Spondylosis (Arthritis)

Cervical spondylosis is a chronic condition that causes neck pain. A less technical name for this condition is osteoarthritis of the neck, or degenerative disk disease of the neck. For more on arthritis click on the arthritis title on this condition tab.

Spinal Stenosis

Spinal stenosis involves a narrowing of the spaces in the spinal vertebrae that protect the spinal cord. There are many possible causes for spinal stenosis, but osteoarthritis and disc herniation are the main ones.

Disc Disorders

As you age, the cushioning discs between your vertebrae become dry and stiff, narrowing the spaces in your spinal column where the nerves come out. The discs in your neck may also herniate. This means the inner gelatinous cartilage material of a disc protrudes through the disc's tougher cartilage covering. Neck pain may occur or nearby nerves can be irritated. Other tissues and bony growths (spurs) also can press on your nerves as they exit your spinal cord, causing pain.

Cervical Kyphosis - Loss of Spinal Curve in the Neck Area

Cervical kyphosis is a common diagnosis for a loss of the cervical curve. It may be a symptom of another injury - for example heavy muscle spasm. In some cases a loss of the normal spinal curvature is asymptomatic, but quite often cervical kyphosis causes neck pain. Whether painful or silent, a reversal of the curvature is not normal and should be addressed through conservative means, such as physical therapy and gentle chiropractic care.

Whiplash

Whiplash is the sudden movement of the neck first back, then forward, usually caused by a rear end car crash. Whiplash injuries cause symptoms ranging from headaches to stiff necks to low back pain.

What Is a 'Crick in the Neck?'

A "crick in the neck" is not an official medical diagnosis, and therefore the term means different things to different people. For many, a "crick in my neck" is something they wake up with after a night of awkward pillowing or body positioning.

In most cases, "cricks in the neck" are due to muscle spasm. Other causes cited were:

- arthritis*
- myofascial pain syndrome and/or trigger points*
- cervical radiculopathy, which is pain that radiates from the neck*
- disc related pain*

*If you have experienced any of the above-mentioned conditions or symptoms, you may be a candidate for conservative therapy at our office. Give us a call to find out today **(908) 753-0144**.*

