

# NECK AND ARM PAIN

## Due to Cervical Nerve Irritation

### WHY DOES MY ARM HURT?

The nerves that send messages to and from the hand pass through bony canals of the spinal column in the lower part of the neck. When a nerve in the neck is irritated or swollen, you may feel pain and tingling in part of the arm or hand. You may also feel pain in the shoulder or upper back. You may or may not feel pain or stiffness in the neck.

### WHAT CAUSES THE NERVES TO BECOME IRRITATED?

Repeated movements or sustained positions may cause irritation of the nerve.

The joints very close to the nerve may become stressed and inflamed.

Arthritis or age related changes may cause bony spurring and narrowing of the nerve canals.

Arthritic joints may become inflamed by repeated movements or sustained positions.

In rare instances the disc in the neck may become injured irritating the nerve.

### HOW LONG WILL THE SYMPTOMS LAST?

If nerve inflammation is reduced and irritating movements and positions are avoided, you should expect slow steady recovery in 6-8 weeks. Usually the pain will improve before the numbness, tingling or weakness.

### WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MYSELF?

- **Ice** - the base of the neck, **15** minutes, **4-6** times each day. Continue icing 4-6 times daily for the 1<sup>st</sup> week, then 2-3 times each day as long as the symptoms last. A bag of frozen vegetables or a gel ice pack works well.
- **Medication** - Talk to your health care provider or consult the ***Healthwise Handbook***. It may take 10-14 days for the medication to be fully effective.
- A **Soft Cervical Collar** may be used for the first 10-14 days. Fasten collar in the front. A good alternative is a towel, rolled and wrapped around the neck. The use of a collar beyond two weeks may lead to muscle weakness.

### WHEN SHOULD I CALL MY HEALTH CARE PROVIDER?

If you experience numbness in both hands or both legs at the same time.

If you are having difficulty initiating urination.

If you experience more weakness and are starting to drop things.

## POSITION AND ACTIVITY GUIDELINES TO PROMOTE HEALING AND MINIMIZE SYMPTOMS

### SITTING

- Support low back with folded towel
- Support arms on pillows to unload shoulders and neck
- Avoid sitting more than 20-30 minutes
- Avoid soft chairs and sofas



### WALKING AND STANDING

- Use a fanny pack at your waist instead of carrying a purse
- Hook thumb on waistband of pants, belt loops, or pocket
- During daily activities that require you to stand (i.e. cooking, washing dishes, brushing teeth, etc.) place one foot on a step
- As time allows, for every hour you are up, lie down for 5 minutes to allow inflamed tissues to rest



### NECK MOVEMENTS

- Avoid tilting your head back
- Avoid tipping or turning your head to the affected side
- Gently rotate your head to the opposite side to ease pain

### SLEEPING

- Lie on your back and create support for your head and shoulders using 2 pillows to form an inverted V
- A pillow under your knees may increase comfort
- Lie on your side with one pillow between your legs for comfort and another pillow to support your head and neck in the midline position. Press the pillow into the crook of your neck
- Do not sleep on your stomach



### TOWEL TRACTION

- Self traction may be helpful
- Use as directed by your health care provider

