
Neck Pain

Neck pain and stiffness can be caused by a number of different reasons. Among these are: a strain or spasm of the neck muscles, inflammation of the neck joints, arthritis, damage to the disks between the neck vertebrae, or simply muscle tension. Neck may be felt directly in the shoulder, on the upper back, from the back of the head down across the back of the shoulders, or even down the arm.

Most neck pain that isn't caused by arthritis or injury can be avoided by simply following these preventive measures.

Working

- Make sure that you sit up straight in your chair so that your lower back is supported. Don't sit for long periods of time. Get up and move around a few times each hour to stretch your neck muscles.
- Always try to keep your head and neck in a relaxed, neutral position over your body.
- If you work at a computer, make sure that the top of the screen is at eye level, and use a document holder that places any copy that you are referring to at the same level as the screen.
- If you use the telephone often, use a headset or speakerphone whenever possible.
- Adjust your car seat to an upright position that supports your lower back and head.

Sleeping

- Sleep on your back or side, not on your stomach.
- When sleeping on your side, make sure your nose is in line with the center of your body so that your neck isn't awkwardly twisted.
- Sleep on a hard mattress and consider using special neck support pillows.
- Don't sleep on pillows that prop your head forward when you're sleeping on your back. Again, you want to keep your neck in a natural, relaxed position. Finding the right pillow can do a lot to prevent neck problems.

Exercising

- Do neck strengthening exercises at least once a day.
- You might want to refer to your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook* for a description of these exercises. Believe it or not, even walking can help prevent neck pain.
- Practice progressive muscle relaxation exercises. These relaxation techniques are also described in your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.

If neck pain persists—even after you've tried these preventive measures—you can often treat it at home with one or more of the following steps:

- Apply an ice or cold pack to your painful muscles for 10 to 15 minutes at a time, as often as every hour. If your pain is in the shoulder or upper back, it's usually best to ice the back of the neck.

- Take ibuprofen (such as Motrin), acetaminophen (such as Tylenol), or aspirin to relieve pain. (However, don't give aspirin to children or teens under the age of 20.)
- Take short walks for 5 to 10 minutes, three or four times a day. Pain can be relieved by gently swinging your arms while walking.
- Do gentle neck exercises repeatedly throughout the day. However, don't do any exercise that causes pain.

If neck pain or a stiff neck occurs along with headache and fever, call your doctor or medical professional immediately. You should also call if the pain shoots down your arm, if you experience numbness or tingling in your hands, if you develop weakness in your arms or legs, or if a blow or injury to the neck has caused new pain. Finally, you should call if you can't manage your neck pain at home or if the pain has lasted two weeks or longer without improvement.

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For more health information ...

- Connect to our Web site at *members.kp.org*
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone at 1-800-332-7563. For TTY, call 1-800-777-9059.
- Visit your facility's Health Education Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.

If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist.

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