

EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT AND MINOR INJURY UNITS

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NECK SPRAIN

NECK INJURIES

Minor sprains in the neck are common injuries, especially after a road traffic accident. The pain may not appear until some time after the accident and is often much worse the following morning when you wake-up. This is because spasm develops in the muscles. In the majority of cases, **neck X-rays are NOT required** - even if there is significant pain.

TREATMENT

Pain-killers should be taken on a regular basis rather than waiting until you are very sore. Heat or ice can be used to relieve the pain. Use either a hot water bottle or bag of frozen peas covered in a towel and hold this against your neck for 10-15 minutes. It is important that you follow the advice on this card about sleeping and that you do the recommended exercises to relieve the muscle spasm.

If you develop tingling or weakness in your arms, you should contact NHS 24 on 111.

Sleeping with your neck sprain

Avoid using too many pillows - use a max of two. Try to keep your head and neck in a straight line with the rest of your spine. Lie on your back or side - avoid lying on your front. A rolled-up towel placed inside the pillow cover can help to support your neck. Always roll onto your side and tuck your chin in, before moving your head off the pillow.



CORRECT: Head straight in line with back, firm bed



WRONG: Head pushed up, pillow too thick

A neck collar is not used because it makes the spasm worse and means the sprain takes longer to heal

NECK EXERCISES

The following exercises will help to relieve the spasm in your neck. They should be performed in a sitting position.

Repeat each exercise x10, around 3-4 x/day.

These exercises may be uncomfortable - THIS IS NORMAL

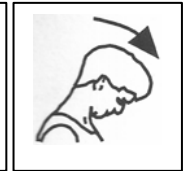
HEAD RETRACTION

Sit with your back straight. Pull your chin in keeping your neck and back straight. Hold this position until you feel the stretch. Repeat ten times



HEAD EXTENSION / FLEXION

Sit as before with your chin pulled in. Bend your head backwards until you feel a stretch. Hold and count to three then relax. Now bend forwards until you feel a stretch and hold again and count to three. Relax and repeat ten times



HEAD ROTATION

Sit with your back straight. Turn your head to one side until you feel a stretch. Hold and count to three. Turn your head to the other side and hold again. Relax and repeat ten times



HEAD TILT

Tilt your head towards one shoulder until you feel the stretch on the opposite side. Hold for 3 seconds then repeat to the other side. Repeat ten times



Physiotherapy



If your pain is affecting your activity and persisting, you can ask your GP to refer you to a physiotherapist, or you can refer yourself directly.

You can also download "NHS 24 MSK" App on your phone for exercises and advice. This resource is free of charge.

