

Neck pain is common in people of all ages. According to the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons (AAOS), 80% of Americans will suffer from a neck or back injury at some point in their life.



Common Causes

The neck is vulnerable to pain or injury because it is less protected than most other areas of the body. Neck pain can be the result of muscle tension/strain, degenerative changes or traumatic injury.

Muscle tension/strain is a frequent cause of neck pain. The muscles in your neck can become easily fatigued, which creates tension and in many cases can lead to a strain. If the strain is left untreated, it can result in a pulled muscle around the spine or even a tear in small muscle fibers. If these symptoms persist without treatment, your neck is in danger of chronic pain and stiffness.

Degenerative changes in the cervical spine can be caused by aging, illness or injury. As we age, we lose liquid and elasticity in our discs forcing increased stress to be absorbed in the neck. That increased stress can cause further wear and collapse, affecting the way the neck joints fit together. When this happens, you will experience symptoms such as a pinched nerve, herniated disc and arthritis of the neck joints. People may go through degenerative changes, but it does not necessarily mean everyone will feel pain or encounter a problem.

Traumatic injuries like a fall or car accident can produce symptoms such as whiplash, blood vessel injury, vertebral fractures or even paralysis.

NECK PAIN GUIDE

Treatment

Ice/Heat is commonly used to reduce inflammation and help with pain. Ice is used most frequently to control the swelling associated with acute injuries. Heat may be used to treat chronic conditions, and is best used before activity.

Rest is important during neck recovery. After experiencing a neck injury, activities of daily living can put stress on the neck muscles. Lying down throughout the day will provide the neck with necessary relief.

Gentle stretching of all supporting muscles of the neck is a proactive way to reach full range of motion. Complete neck inactivity will result in increased stiffness. When stretching, it is important not to stretch to the point of pain.

Lifestyle and adjustments can make a tremendous difference in neck pain. Sleeping with a neck pillow or adjusting your posture may help. Adjusting the height of your workplace chair may also help. Try reading the “Posture in the Workplace” article in the ‘Education Corner’ tab at www.ptidaho.com.

Whenever pain worsens or is caused by a more serious condition, you should always be diagnosed and treated by a medical professional.

What to expect from a neck evaluation at Physical Therapy of Idaho

- Range of motion measurements: this is to determine how much your neck is moving as well as shoulders.
- Palpation: touching various structures around the neck and shoulders to feel for abnormalities or painful-to-touch structures.
- Strength measurement: testing the strength of muscles around the neck and shoulders to determine weakness or imbalances that may lead to neck pain.
- Special tests: these tests are specific maneuvers performed on the neck and shoulders to help determine what specific structure is causing pain or problems.

Most insurance carriers do not require a doctor’s referral for you to commence treatment at Physical Therapy of Idaho. We can usually get you in for your evaluation within 24 hours of calling for an appointment, so relief may be only a phone call away. Our physical therapists have between 10 and 20 years of experience in treating pain and injuries, so let us help you get you back to your best, pain free. Call us today!

