



The Neck: What Can (and Does) Go Wrong!

Chances are you don't think about the muscles surrounding your neck much. These muscles hold your head up and allow it to move it in different directions. These muscles allow you to trace a bug flying across the room, or to follow a tennis ball as you get ready to swing back at it. Then one day, you wake up and suddenly can't move your head, or can only turn to one side. And you experience, literally... **a pain in the neck.**

That's a scenario none of us want, but it's more common than we realize. The neck is made up of many small muscles and carries a lot of nerves, and can easily suffer from a disc injury or pinched nerves. Due to its mobility and flexibility, the neck has a high risk of injury.

What can go wrong?

A "pulled muscle" (or **muscle strain**), occurs when a muscle is stretched or exerted beyond its limits. In severe cases, it can lead to a **muscle tear**.

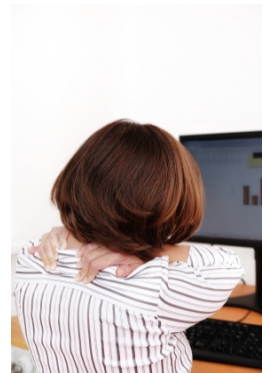
A "slipped disc" (which can be a **herniated or bulging disc**) is a disc that has been pushed beyond its boundaries. It may even bulge out and spill into the surrounding area, putting pressure on the ligaments, muscles, or even the nerve itself.

Herniated discs often start with no symptoms, but may eventually lead to tingling, numbness or even sharp pain. So, what are the common causes of a herniated disc?

- Poor body mechanics with daily activities (like frequently lifting or bending improperly)
- Poor posture (in sitting or standing, or too much time on the computer)
- Sports injuries that require a lot of running, jumping or extreme flexibility (like gymnastics)

Common ways to injure your neck can be a fall or an accident, but sometimes neck pain appears out of nowhere. Years of abuse -- like poor posture or poor body mechanics -- can trigger an incident.

Read below to see what our therapists recommend to help you "take the load off your neck".



The Consequences of Neck Inactivity

In one form or another, excessive stress on the neck is certainly the most familiar cause of injury to the neck muscles. However, a second cause is slightly less threatening, but more common -- **inactivity**. Failure to use the neck muscles regularly through moderate activity leads to sudden overuse, poor posture and other stresses on the neck. As a result, the joints, muscles and ligaments stiffen, and suffer from poor blood flow.

Inactivity by itself can make the neck more susceptible to general joint degeneration!

The effects of inactivity are magnified as we age. This can lead to degeneration in the bones and joints in the neck.



Interestingly, the X-ray of an elderly person's neck who is more active may look "younger" than the X-ray of the neck of an inactive person in his thirties.

Don't underestimate the importance of exercising those small, but important, muscles of your neck.

Remember to check with your health care provider before beginning any new exercise program.

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Call us today to see how we can help get your neck to feel and function "younger".

The Best Treatment For Your Neck

Some neck problems, like a mild sprain or strain, may get better simply with rest and ice.

Other injuries, like a pinched nerve or disc injury may need a more advanced physical therapy plan tailored to your particular type of injury, like:

- Specific exercises to strengthen the neck and improve range of motion, and
- Modalities (like heat/ice, electrical stimulation, or ultrasound).

Here are some **tips to keep your neck moving and functioning pain-free:**

1. If your job requires you to lift frequently (like in construction work or furniture moving) – be sure to keep good posture as you are lifting. Remember lift with your legs, not your arms or back!
2. If you have to stand for long hours (like working in an assembly-line) – try using a low footstool to prop up one foot, alternating feet from time to time.
3. If you are at a computer all day – keep your chair, desk, and monitor at the proper heights.

Be sure to call us to schedule a complete analysis of what your risk of neck injury is. Remember, help is only a phone call away.

Tip to consider:

Do not use towel bars for support when in the bathroom. Grab bars are an inexpensive modification and can be well worth the cost when compared to potential injuries.

