

MANAGING NECK PAIN FOLLOWING CONCUSSION

Concussion/Mild Traumatic Brain Injury

Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center



NECK PAIN FOLLOWING CONCUSSION

When you injured your head you may have also had neck trauma resulting in pain. This pain can cause headache. Most people recover from neck pain quickly. This fact sheet explains how to manage neck pain that you may experience after a concussion. Always consult your health care provider about your neck pain and its treatment.

THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HELP RELIEVE NECK PAIN

1. BODY MECHANICS:

- How you hold your head can cause painful muscle strain, or make existing pain worse. Some postures that can strain the neck are:
 - Leaning forward when driving or working at a computer
 - Cradling the phone between your head and shoulder
- You can also strain your neck by staying in positions too long. Take short breaks every 10-15 minutes and do stretching exercises (see next page)
- Be aware of your position relative to things you're working on:
 - Don't bend your head down to read; bring the book up toward you
 - Adjust the distance to the monitor so you're not leaning forward to see
 - Sit facing forward, not sideways, in meetings, classes or while watching TV, so you are not turning your head

2. SLEEP POSITION:

- Make sure you correctly support and position your head and neck.
- Lie on your back using a pillow or a rolled up towel to support your neck. If you sleep on your side keep your spine straight and neck supported. Avoid any position if it aggravates your neck pain.



3. ICE OR HEAT:

- Try moist heat since it can help relax muscle spasms.
- Before stretching, use a warm gel pack or take a 10-20 minute shower to relax your muscles.
- After stretching, use ice on your neck for about 15-20 minutes; ice can ease inflammation and numb pain, but stop using if you have stiffness or headaches.
- As a general rule, cold is better for recent injuries and warmth soothes persistent pain; use what provides the most relief!



4. NECK STRETCHES:

Before starting any of these exercises, sit on a firm supporting surface. Assume an upright, erect posture. Perform each stretch slowly; make sure not to move your trunk or shoulders. Remember to keep breathing normally; don't hold your breath.

Pull up:



- Look straight ahead with head level.
- Pull chin slowly forward toward chest.
- Bring head slowly up to level position.
- Hold 15-25 seconds when chin nearly rests on chest; relax; repeat 3 to 5 times.

Retract:



- Look straight ahead with head level.
- Pull chin straight back (like a turtle head retracting into its shell). Don't rock back and forth, or shrug shoulders.
- Bring head slowly forward until your neck is completely straight.
- Hold position for 15-25 seconds; relax; repeat 3 to 5 times.

Deeper stretch:



- Place your hand on chin and gently press chin back as you flatten your neck.
- Bring forehead slowly forward until you feel the stretch in the back of your neck maintaining mild resistance with your hand on chin.
- Hold position for 15-25 seconds; relax; repeat 3 to 5 times.

Flexion (chin to chest):



- Place hand on crown of head with head level.
- Push chin slowly forward and down toward chest. Keep back straight and don't roll shoulders forward.
- Hold 15-25 seconds when chin rests on chest; relax; repeat 3 to 5 times.

Lateral flexion (ear to shoulder):



- Look straight ahead with head level.
- Place hand at the crown, on far-side of head.
- Pull head gently sideways, bringing ear down toward shoulder.
- Hold stretch, and then slowly bring head back up to starting position. Repeat with arm on opposite side, toward other shoulder.

Rotation (turn):



- Look straight ahead with head level.
- Turn head slowly right until reaching full rotation, hold 15-25 seconds
- Turn head slowly back to middle start-position, relax.
- Rotate head to left full rotation, holding stretch 15 to 25 seconds; repeat 3 to 5 times.

For deeper stretch, perform neck rotation with hand on your chin:

- Turn head right as far as you can; do not drop chin forward.
- Use your hands to apply slight pressure to your head while you turn, feel the deeper stretch in your neck, hold 15-25 seconds; relax.
- Rotate head left full rotation while keeping resistance with left hand, hold 15-25 seconds; repeat 3 to 5 times.

If any of these stretches cause pain, stop them immediately and try repositioning. If pain or discomfort persists, contact your primary care provider or other health care professional.

To view a neck stretch video, scan the the QR code to the right or go to youtu.be/POE6bij3Yh8



YouTube

NOTE : A physical or occupational therapist can instruct you on performing every-day activities in ways that limit neck strain, and can address pain with specific neck exercises and with methods such as heat, ultrasound, and deep-tissue massage.