

# Neck Strain

## What is neck strain?

A strain is a tear of a muscle or tendon. Your neck is surrounded by small muscles, that run close to the vertebrae, and larger muscles, that make up the visible muscles of the neck.

## How does it occur?

Neck strains most often occur when the head and neck are forcibly moved, such as in a whiplash injury or from contact in sports. Sometimes strains can occur from an awkward position during sleep or poor posture while working at a computer.

## What are the symptoms?

You have pain in your neck. When the neck muscles go into spasm you feel hard, tight muscles in your neck that are very tender to the touch. You have pain when you move your head to either side or when you try to move your head up or down. The spasming muscles can cause headaches.

The pain may start right after an injury or may take a few hours or days to develop. Other symptoms may include neck stiffness, dizziness, or unusual sensations, such as burning or a pins-and-needles feeling.

## How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will examine your neck. Your neck muscles will be tender and tight. You may have pain over the bones in your neck. Your healthcare provider may order X-rays to make sure the vertebrae are not injured.

## How is it treated?

Right after the injury you should place an ice pack on your neck for 20 to 30 minutes every 3 or 4 hours for 2 to 3 days or until the pain goes away.

Your healthcare provider may prescribe an anti-inflammatory medication and a neck collar to support your neck and prevent further injury. Adults aged 65 years and older should not take non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medicine for more than 7 days without their healthcare provider's approval.

If you still have neck pain several days after the injury and after using ice, your healthcare provider may recommend using moist heat on your neck. You can buy a moist-heat pad or make your own by soaking towels in hot water. Put moist heat on your neck for 20 to 30 minutes every 3 or 4 hours until the pain goes away. You

may find that it helps to alternate putting heat and ice on your neck.

### How long will the effects last?

The length of recovery depends on many factors such as your age, health, and if you have had a previous neck injury. Recovery time also depends on the severity of the injury. A mild injury may recover within a few weeks, whereas a severe injury may take 6 weeks or longer to recover. Ask your healthcare provider when you can return to your normal activities.

### How can I prevent neck strain?

Neck strain is best prevented by having strong and supple neck muscles. If you have a job that requires you to be in one position all day (for example, work at a computer all day), it is very important to take breaks and relax your neck muscles.

In many cases an injury to the neck occurs during an accident that is not preventable.

---

Published by McKesson Corporation.

This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.

Written by Pierre Rouzier, M.D., for McKesson Corporation

Copyright © 2007 McKesson Corporation and/or one of its subsidiaries. All Rights Reserved.

### **Special Instructions:**