

Mechanical Neck Pain

What is Mechanical Neck pain?

Pain can arise from the muscles and joints of the neck causing what is called “Mechanical Neck Pain”. This can be due to injury, but you can also have neck pain without damage or injury.

Who gets it?

Mechanical neck pain is very common- it is cited that 9 out of 10 adults will have some degree of pain in the neck by the time they are 60 years old. Many physical or psychological factors can cause neck pain and often a combination of these are involved.

- Physical factors, such as ‘protecting’ the neck and avoiding movements, or a simple strain.
- Psychological factors, including a fear of damage or not getting better, feeling down or being stressed.
- More general health and lifestyle factors, like being tired and rundown, not getting enough good quality sleep, or not getting enough physical activity
- Social triggers, such as difficult relationships at work or home, low job satisfaction or stressful life events, like a family death or illness.
- Crucially, it’s important to know that all pain is 100 per cent real and never ‘all in your head’, even when factors like stress or mood are involved.

Each of the factors can turn up the volume on your pain and gaining a greater understanding of when that can happen puts you in a stronger position to recognise them and learn how to turn down the dial again.

Symptoms can be constant or come and go. These include:

- Pain around the neck, back of the head or into the tops of the shoulders
- Stiffness or reduced range of movement of the neck
- Headaches
- Sometimes people will develop other symptoms such as: tingling, numbness or pain radiating into their arms – if you have these please discuss with your physiotherapist

Mechanical Neck Pain (continued)

How is it diagnosed?

Mechanical neck pain is diagnosed by your GP or Physiotherapist by taking a history from you about your symptoms and carrying out the necessary examination. Tests such as X-rays and MRI scans are rarely helpful in the diagnosis of mechanical neck pain.

What can I do to help?

- Regularly changing posture/ position, rather than holding prolonged static postures.
- General cardiovascular exercise can be very helpful e.g. swimming, walking, cycling
- Relaxation techniques and breathing exercises can be very helpful
- Experimenting with sleeping positions and pillows until you find one that works for you
- Painkillers such as paracetamol are effective
- At Work, setting timers to ensure position changes, completing workplace stretches, and working with colleagues to create an active team environment

How can therapy help?

In addition to the things you can do yourself, mechanical neck pain can be managed very effectively through a combination of:

- Advice on exercise, general health and pain management approaches
- Prescribing exercises to increase/ maintain mobility and strength of the neck and upper limbs

What other treatments might help?

- If there is a large work place element to the pain and limitation from this, consider a workplace assessment and occupational health review
- Psychological support can help some patients with coping strategies/ or where stress is a significant factor
- Considering other medications for pain with your GP including a group of drugs called neuropathic painkillers