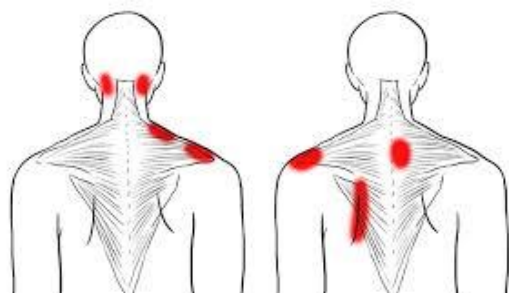


## Neck Injury Advice

Neck injuries and pain can happen during or after road traffic collision (RTC), sports or even with everyday activities such as jolting the neck when you trip or fall. It may take several hours after the injury for symptoms like pain to develop.



Pain or stiffness will often develop in the neck and/or shoulders and/or mid back as shown here. It usually gets worse over the first day or so but does gradually get better, even though this may take some time. The pain and stiffness should start to wear off in about 4-5 days.

Sometimes neck pain is a result of Acute Torticollis (wry neck) which is explained on page 3

Things you should do	Things you shouldn't do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply a heat pack to your neck for 15 - 20 minutes every 2 hours if you can.</li> <li>• Always wrap a hot water bottle in a towel and never put it directly onto your skin.</li> <li>• Take the recommended medication to relieve the pain – See page 4 for more information</li> <li>• Keep moving, even if you move slowly at first and do each exercise every hour if you can - the more you exercise your neck the faster your recovery</li> <li>• If you find heat doesn't work then you can try an ice pack instead - again wrap it in a towel first.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use heat/ice packs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- over areas of skin that are in poor condition</li> <li>- if you have poor sensation to cold</li> <li>- if you know you have poor circulation.</li> <li>- leave heat/ice on while asleep</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Drive if your neck movements are limited</li> <li>• wear a neck collar – it's better to keep your neck moving (unless a clinician tells you not to)</li> </ul>

### Exercises

**Begin these flexibility exercises as soon as you can** - provided they don't cause excessive pain – as they are designed to mobilise the joints, strengthen your muscles and so improve the range of movement and function of your neck. The repetitions and sets are a guideline. You will not cause damage to your neck by moving it.

## How to tell if you're exercising at the right level

When doing exercise you should listen to your pain levels, especially in the early stages. You may find that these exercises increase your symptoms slightly in the beginning. However, they should get easier over time. It can be helpful to rate your pain out of 10 (0 being no pain and 10 being the worst pain you have ever had), for example:

**Green** 1 to 3 - mild pain

**Amber** 4 to 6 – moderate pain

**Red** 7 to 10 - severe pain

Aim to keep your pain within a rating of 0 to 5. If your pain gets above this level, you can change the exercises by:

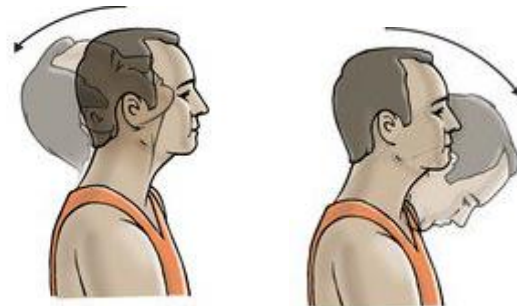
- reducing the number of times, you do a movement

- reducing the speed of a movement

- increasing rest time between movements

### Exercise 1 Neck Extension and Flexion

Stretch yourself up so that you are standing/sitting up straight. Look up towards the ceiling, then downwards putting your chin to your chest.



### Exercise 2 Rotation

Turn your head round to look over your shoulder until you feel a stretch.

Hold for about 3 seconds.

Repeat on the other side.

Repeat 10 times.



**If you are at all concerned about your injury please contact the relevant  
Emergency Department/Minor Injury Unit (MIU):**

**Royal Gwent Hospital: 01633 234056**

**Nevill Hall Hospital: 01873 732073**

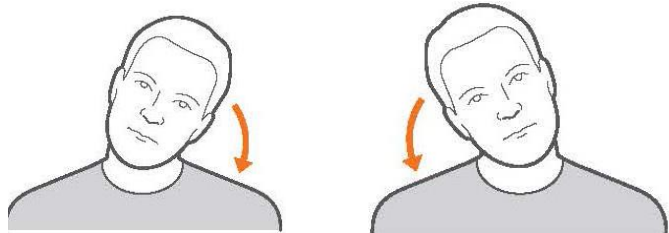
**Ysbyty Ystrad Fawr (YYF) MIU 01443 802353**

**GUH: 01633 493287**

**Ysbyty Aneurin Bevan (YAB) MIU: 01495 363318**

### Exercise 3 Side bending

Facing forwards try to touch your ear down to your shoulder until you feel a stretch on the opposite side. Hold for 3 seconds. Do the same on other side. Repeat 10 times.



### Exercise 4

Sit/Stand upright. Keeping your neck and back straight – pull your chin in, using your fingertips. You should feel a stretch at the base of your skull. Hold for 3 seconds. Repeat 10 times.

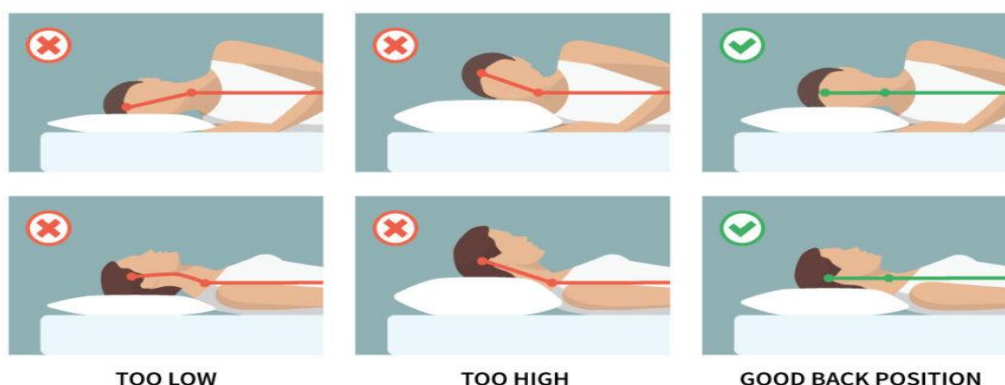


Try and do all these exercises 3 – 4 times a day. If your pain seems worse do them less frequently and don't move/ push as hard, rather than stopping completely. As the pain eases you can build up again.

### To avoid neck pain in bed:

Sleeping on your side or on your back provides a better position for your neck. Feather or memory foam pillows easily conform to the shape of the neck but avoid a high or stiff pillow, as this will keep the neck flexed and can result in pain and stiffness - see page 3 for the correct position of your neck/head. Don't sleep face down as this position places the most stress on your neck muscles. If you can't sleep any other way than on your stomach, try using a very slim pillow or going without one altogether.

A small roll-shaped pillow—or a rolled up towel - under your neck for additional support may help.



## **Remember**

Keeping up your normal activities and staying active are important factors in getting better more quickly. Limiting what you do may delay your recovery. Stay active - stay at or return to work - but remember not to carry out activities which aggravate any pains you may have in your neck and/or arm(s). Avoid doing anything that could be dangerous because you cannot move your neck – for example, driving or cycling

## **Do I need to be seen again?**

It is important that you contact your GP or the Emergency Department at the Grange University Hospital if you develop the following problems:

- If the pain becomes worse despite taking regular pain relief.
- If the pain persists beyond 10 days
- If other symptoms develop such as loss of feeling (numbness), weakness, or persistent pins and needles in part of an arm or hand or legs. These may indicate irritation to or pressure on a nerve emerging from the spinal cord.

## **Can neck sprains from RTCs be prevented?**

Modern vehicles are increasingly designed to minimise the impact of collisions on the neck, including head restraints on vehicle seats which may prevent some neck sprains. The head restraint should be as high as the top of the head. This may stop the head from jolting backwards in an RTC.

## **What is Acute (sudden onset) Torticollis (or wry neck)?**

Torticollis occurs when the muscles supporting your neck on one side become painful. These symptoms usually come on very quickly, often overnight, so that you wake up with pain and stiffness usually down one side of your neck causing your neck to twist to one side. It can happen in people with no previous neck symptoms, and there is usually no obvious injury.

You may find it very difficult when you try to straighten your neck, due to pain, which may spread to the back of your head or to your shoulder. The muscles on the affected side may be tender.

The cause of this is often not known, but it may be due to a minor sprain or irritation of a muscle or ligament in the neck.

**If you are at all concerned about your injury please contact the relevant  
Emergency Department/Minor Injury Unit (MIU):  
Royal Gwent Hospital: 01633 234056  
Nevill Hall Hospital: 01873 732073  
Ysbyty Ystrad Fawr (YYF) MIU 01443 802353  
GUH: 01633 493287  
Ysbyty Aneurin Bevan (YAB) MIU: 01495 363318**

Some reasons for this condition include:

- Sitting or sleeping in an unusual position without adequate neck support.
- Poor posture when looking at a computer screen.
- Carrying heavy unbalanced loads (for example, a briefcase or shopping bag).
- Allowing certain muscles of the neck to be exposed to cold (sleeping in a draught).

### How do I treat Torticollis?

Treatment is applying warmth, pain relief and gentle exercise (as above).

### What do I take for pain?

No pain relief may be needed if the sprain is mild. However, painkillers such as **Paracetamol**, are useful to ease pain, but it is best to take them regularly for a few days or so rather than every now and then. They can be bought over the counter from a pharmacy or local shops. Make sure you don't take any other product containing Paracetamol. If Paracetamol doesn't help at all despite taking the recommended dose then try changing to Ibuprofen 400 mg three times a day. You can also take both drugs – speak to a pharmacist about the best way to do this. If you have been advised not to take Ibuprofen in the past or are on any blood thinning tablets then avoid Ibuprofen.

**With all medication it is essential that you follow the instructions on the packet or bottle carefully.**

**Anti-inflammatory painkillers** (like Ibuprofen) can be used. These relieve pain and may also limit inflammation and swelling, however if you are pregnant or trying to get pregnant you shouldn't use them. Side effects sometimes occur with anti-inflammatory painkillers - stomach pain and bleeding from the stomach, are the most serious. Some people with asthma, high blood pressure, kidney failure or heart failure may not be able to take them either. You can buy Ibuprofen at pharmacies both in tablet and gel form. There is less risk of side-effects with the gel, however, the amount of the drug that gets into the bloodstream is much less than with tablets and it is important that you use enough gel.

**If you are concerned about your progress, or if you have not improved within 10 days, we advise you to contact your GP or attend the Emergency Department (Not Minor injury unit) at the Grange University Hospital.**

### References:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/neck-pain-and-stiff-neck/>  
<https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/analgesia-mild-to-moderate-pain/#!scenario>  
<https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/neck-pain-whiplash-injury/>  
<https://www.health.harvard.edu/pain/say-good-night-to-neck-pain>  
<https://patient.info/bones-joints-muscles/neck-pain/torticollis-twisted-neck>