

# Advice for patients who have an Injury to the neck

Sprains to the neck muscles are common after sports injuries and road traffic accidents. Spasm in the muscles is a normal reaction to small tears in them. This is what causes the stiffness and pain you are experiencing. Most people find that the stiffness gets worse over the first 12-24 hours after the injury.

It is important that you get your neck moving as soon as possible. You will probably need to take some painkillers to get you started, but you will find that regular exercise helps to reduce the pain and increase the movements. The pain and stiffness should gradually begin to wear off after 4-5 days.

## Exercises

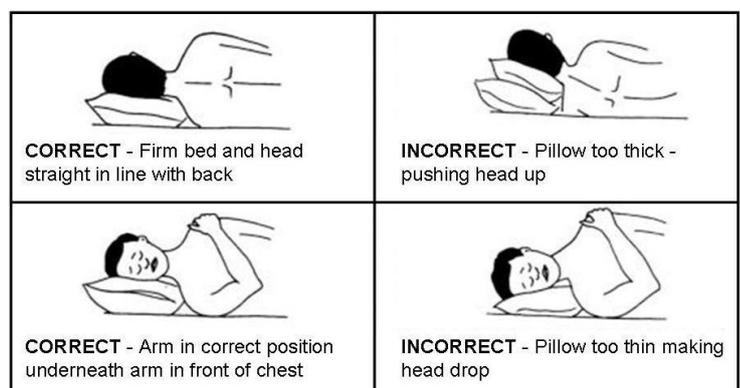
You should be sitting upright in a good position before starting the exercises. Use smooth, slow movements. If any of your symptoms are aggravated by any of the exercises you must **stop**.

- Sit up straight. Tuck in your chin to make a double chin as much as possible and then relax.
- Turn your head gently round to look over each shoulder in turn.
- Look straight ahead and then try to touch your right ear down to your right shoulder. Repeat on the left.
- Gently bend your head backwards and forwards.

Repeat each exercise 10 times, four times a day. If the exercises are painful to do while sitting, you may find them easier to do lying on your back. If you do exercise this way, ensure your head is supported with a pillow (see below).

## Lying down

When you are in bed ensure that your head is supported by a pillow but not pushed up by one that is too thick or allowed to drop by one that is too thin. Your head should be straight in line with your back. If you sleep on your side, the underneath arm should cross the front of the chest with the hand on the opposite shoulder.



## These things may also help

- Apply a cold compress to your neck for 10 minutes. If you use an ice pack always wrap it in a towel first. **Never apply the ice pack directly to the skin or over broken skin.**
- A hot water bottle can be used for 15-20 minutes at a time if you find the ice too uncomfortable.
- If you feel you are not well on the road to recovery after a week, please contact the Emergency Department or your GP to consider a referral to a physiotherapist.

### You should return to the Emergency Department at once if:

- You develop numbness or tingling in an arm or leg.
- You have problems passing urine or become incontinent.

## Driving

You should not drive until you are able to check your mirrors and blind spots without hesitation and can make an emergency stop. You should not drive if the pain (or the painkillers you are taking for the pain) distracts your attention from the road.

## If you have any problems, or for further advice please contact:

- Emergency Department      01535 294481
- Your GP
- NHS 111                              111, or 111.nhs.uk

## Are you a victim of Domestic Violence? For confidential advice, contact:

Bradford	0808 2800 999	<a href="https://www.stayingput.uk.net/contact">https://www.stayingput.uk.net/contact</a>
North Yorkshire	03000 110 110	<a href="https://www.idas.org.uk/">https://www.idas.org.uk/</a>
Lancashire	0300 323 0085	<a href="https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/your-health-and-wellbeing/domestic-abuse/">https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/your-health-and-wellbeing/domestic-abuse/</a>

If you require this leaflet in other languages or formats please telephone the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01535 294019

Author: Emergency Department  
Date of publication: December 2011  
Revised: February 2022  
Date of review: February 2025

[www.airedaletrust.nhs.uk](http://www.airedaletrust.nhs.uk)