

Neck Pain - Muscle Strain

Definition

- Pain or discomfort in the back, side or front of the neck
- Stiff neck (limited range of motion) is also common
- Includes minor muscle strain from neck overuse

Health Information

Causes

- In teens, new neck pain is mostly from strained neck muscles (muscle overuse).
- The most common modern cause is working with the head down in a flexed position. Such head tilting occurs with texting or looking at smart devices.
- Other triggers are sleeping in an awkward position or fixing something on the ceiling. Reading in bed or working on a computer for hours can also be causes.
- At all ages, it can be from a swollen lymph node. That can cause spasm of the neck muscle it lies against.
- Pain in the front of the neck often is from a sore throat. It can also be from a swollen lymph node.

Symptoms of Strained Neck Muscles

- The head is often cocked to one side
- Can't bend the head backward or put the chin to each shoulder. Usually bending it forward is not limited.
- The neck muscles are often sore to the touch

Pain Scale

- **Mild:** Your child feels pain and tells you about it. But, the pain does not keep your child from any normal activities. School, play and sleep are not changed.
- **Moderate:** The pain keeps your child from doing some normal activities. It may wake him or her up from sleep.
- **Severe:** The pain is very bad. It keeps your child from doing all normal activities.

Care Advice

1. Overview:

- Most new neck pain is from stretching and turning the neck muscles too much.
- This causes strained muscles (also called muscle overuse).
- Long periods of looking down is the most common cause of unexplained neck pain in back. Seen mainly with texting or using other mobile devices.
- Looking up or to the side for too long is also a common trigger.
- Here is some care advice that should help.

2. Pain Medicine:

- To help with the pain, give acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or ibuprofen. Use as needed.

3. **Cold Pack:**
 - During the first 2 days, use a cold pack. You can also use ice wrapped in a wet cloth.
 - Put it on the sore muscles for 20 minutes.
 - Repeat 4 times on the first day, then as needed.
 - Reason: Reduces pain and any spasm.
 - Caution: Avoid frostbite.
4. **Heat Pack:**
 - If pain lasts over 2 days, put heat on the sore muscles.
 - Use a heat pack, heating pad or warm wet washcloth.
 - Do this for 10 minutes, then as needed.
 - Caution: Avoid burns.
5. **Sleep:**
 - Sleep on the back or side, not the stomach. Sleeping face down puts the most stress on the neck muscles.
 - Sleeping with a neck collar helps some people.
 - Use a foam neck collar (from a drug store). If don't have one, wrap a small towel around the neck.
 - Reason: Keep the head from moving too much during sleep.
 - Do this for a few nights.
6. **Stretching Exercises:**
 - Protect the neck for 48 hours.
 - Then start a gentle stretching program.
 - Improve the tone of the neck muscles. Do 2 or 3 minutes per day of gentle neck stretches.
 - Touch the chin to each shoulder. Hold for 10 seconds.
 - Touch the ear to each shoulder. Hold for 10 seconds.
 - Move the head forward and backward.
 - Don't apply any resistance during these stretching exercises.
7. **Prevention of Strained Neck Muscles:**
 - Avoid triggers that overstress the neck muscles. Common triggers are listed below:
 - Keeping the neck turned or bent for a long period of time. The most common cause is bending forward to text or look at a mobile device. Another example is painting a ceiling.
 - The neck likes to keep the head in a neutral position because it is heavy (12 pounds or 5.4 kg).
 - Carrying heavy objects on the head
 - Carrying heavy objects with one arm (instead of both arms)
 - Standing on the head
8. **What to Expect:**
 - New neck pain without a reason most often goes away in a few days.
 - Neck pain from muscle overuse (strained neck muscles) goes away in 1 to 2 weeks.

Call Your Doctor If

- Neck pain becomes severe
- Pain starts to shoot into the arms, upper back or legs
- Unexplained neck pain persists over 3 days
- Pain lasts more than 2 weeks
- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child becomes worse

Pediatric Care Advice

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