

**Patient
Information**

Neck pain

Introduction

This leaflet provides information for people who are experiencing neck pain. Your injury may have been caused due to a motor vehicle incident but the advice is useful for other causes of neck pain.

Increasing pain in the neck muscles following a road traffic incident is sometimes called whiplash. When the body stops suddenly the neck is pulled backwards and forwards by the weight of your head. An X-ray is not often necessary for the assessment of your injury.

Usually pain and stiffness gets worse during the first 24 to 36 hours before gradually improving. Most people will feel more comfortable within a few weeks but sometimes it can take longer.

To prevent this type of injury it is important to make sure that seat belts and car headrests are properly adjusted to your needs. Advice regarding this can be found in most car manuals or online.

Managing your neck pain

- Take regular pain relief such as paracetamol and ibuprofen. Your local pharmacist will be able to advise you if you are already taking any other medications
- Maintain a good posture while awake and sleeping
- Follow the exercises listed in this leaflet
- Use of heat packs maybe helpful. Leaflet GHPI0659 Ice and heat treatment at home is available on the Gloucestershire Hospitals website (www.gloshospitals.nhs.uk)

Reference No.

GHPI0913_07_21

Department

Emergency

Review due

July 2024

**Patient
Information**

Exercise

Gentle exercises to keep the neck mobile will help to prevent long term pain and stiffness. Returning to normal activities and exercise is the most important way that you can:

- ease stiffness and pain
- build up neck muscle strength and stamina
- improve your flexibility and general fitness

The muscles in your neck need to be used as they will weaken very quickly.

To complete these exercises you should stand or sit facing forward:

- Move your head to look from side to side. At first this can be done while you are lying down. Stretch round as far as you can. This will feel uncomfortable
- Move your head to look up and down
- Move your head to tilt your ear towards your shoulder. Do not make circular movements

Remember hurt does not equal harm.

Correct sleeping posture

To avoid neck pain you should always sleep on a firm bed, either on your back or on your side. Try not to sleep face down as this puts added strain on certain neck muscles. If you sleep on your side, the following information is important:

- Make sure that your head and neck are straight, for example, in line with the rest of the spine (as in Figure 1, and never as in Figure 2a and 2b)
- The number of pillows you use may vary due to their thickness but you need to keep your head straight
- The arm on which you are lying must be kept in front of your chest not under it or behind (see Figure 3)

**Patient
Information**

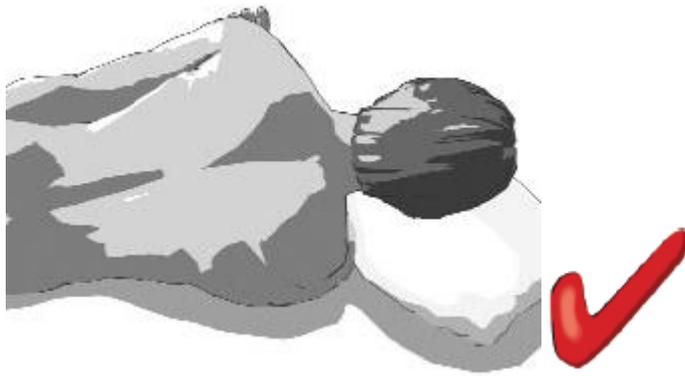


Figure 1 – Correct - Head straight, in line with back.



Figure 2a - Wrong - Head pushed up, pillow too thick.

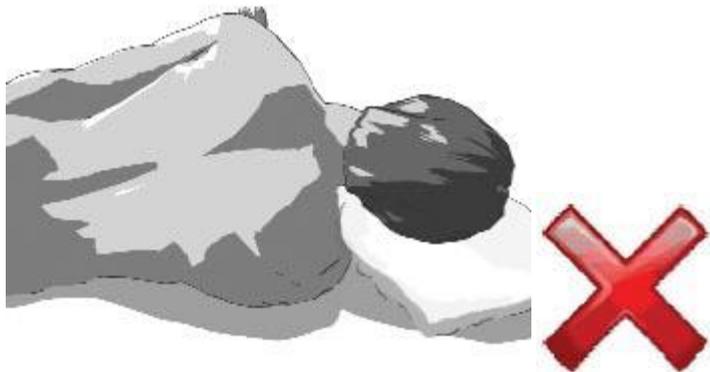


Figure 2b - Wrong - Head dropped, pillow too thin.

**Patient
Information**

Figure 3 - Correct - Arm underneath body in front of chest.

Summary

Your pain should ease within 2 weeks. Most people have a full recovery in about 4 to 6 weeks. You should follow the suggested exercises for at least 6 to 8 weeks. This will help prevent symptoms returning.

Contact information

If you have severe neck pain or weakness in your arms/hands, contact NHS 111 for advice.

NHS 111

Tel: 111

Further information

You can refer yourself to a physiotherapist for advice.

Website: www.gloshospitals.nhs.uk/our-services/services-we-offer/physiotherapy/how-can-i-see-physiotherapist/

NHS Choices

Website: www.nhs.uk/conditions/neck-pain/Pages/Introduction.aspx

Arthritis Research UK

Website: www.arthritisresearchuk.org/arthritis-information/conditions/neck-pain.aspx

Content reviewed: July 2021