

# Neck Pain - Acute

Neck pain is a common problem. Most of the time, neck pain improves within 4 to 6 weeks. (Severe symptoms usually resolve within a few days). Here are some tips and exercises to help you recover quickly and prevent the problem from returning.

## What causes neck pain?

Most neck pain results from irritation or injury to one or more of the parts of the neck. Most commonly this is caused by:

- o *Poor sitting posture while working at your desk or computer; or while reading or driving.*
- o *Stressful work or home situations that increase the tension in the neck muscles.*
- o *Sleeping in an awkward position.*
- o *Looking up repeatedly while doing tasks such as painting or trimming trees.*
- o *Changes in neck alignment due to eye wear.*
- o *Changes to the normal condition of the joints and discs over time.*

## Tips to ease your symptoms

Place a cold or heat pack on your neck for 10-15 minutes to help with the pain. Place a thin cloth layer between the skin and the cold or heat pack. Repeat this several times per day when it is flared up.

Take medications as directed. If the doctor gave you a prescription medicine for pain, take it exactly as directed.

**Walking:** Make a goal of walking a total of 30 minutes per day. Start with short walks (5-10 minutes) several times a day. Use good posture and gently swing your arms during your walk.

Change positions frequently. Avoid holding your neck still or keeping it in one position. Even a “good position” will cause muscle fatigue if maintained for too long. Set a timer to remind you to take a break every 30 minutes.

**Manage your headaches and stress.** An increase in stress may cause more muscle tightness in your neck. This can cause neck and headache pain. Visit your physician’s Home Page at [kp.org/mydoctor](http://kp.org/mydoctor) to take advantage of personalized programs and resources to help you feel better today.

## Sleeping Positions

### On your back



- Support the curve of your neck with a small towel roll. Place the towel roll inside the pillow case at its base.
- Use 1–3 pillows under your thighs and knees to keep your spine in a more comfortable position.
- If you have a painful shoulder/arm, place a pillow underneath your painful arm and on your stomach. Place your hand on the pillow on your stomach.

### Side-lying



- Place a pillow and towel roll supporting your neck and head and 1 to 3 pillows between your knees.
- Hug a pillow across your stomach to support your top arm.

## Posture Exercise - Correct postural position

- o Start by sitting or standing tall, legs uncrossed and feet flat on the floor.
- o Make sure the back of your neck is taller than the front.
- o Gently draw your shoulder blades back and down.
- o Gently nod your chin down as if you are saying ‘yes’.
- o Hold the position for 10 seconds.
- o Repeat regularly, at least every 30 minutes during the day, or more often if you work sitting at a desk.
- o The correct postural position will help ease muscle tension in your neck and shoulders.



To learn more about desk set-up go to your doctor's home page [www.kp.org/mydoctor/\(insert name of your doctor\)](http://www.kp.org/mydoctor/(insert name of your doctor)). Look for the interactive program: 'Smart moves: Computer & Laptop setup'

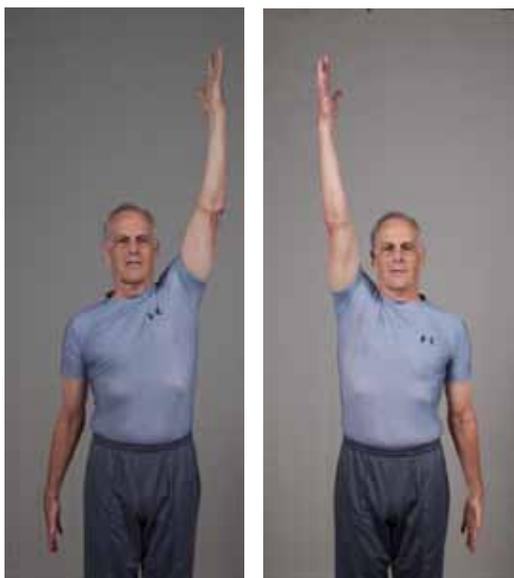
Your physical therapist recommends the following personalized exercise program for you. Please follow your therapist's instructions on how often to hold or repeat each one. If your symptoms feel worse with any exercise, stop doing the exercise until you check with your physical therapist or doctor.

### Shoulder Blade Squeeze



Sit or stand in the correct posture position. Reach your hands down towards the floor. Hold that position and squeeze your shoulder blades together. Hold for 10-30 seconds and repeat 2-3 times every hour you are up.

### Alternating Over Head Reach



Start with your arms relaxed at your side. Raise one hand up over your head and slightly back. Reach the other hand down towards the floor and slightly back. Hold for 3-5 seconds and then switch arms. Repeat 3-10 repetitions with each arm.

### Head Nod/holding

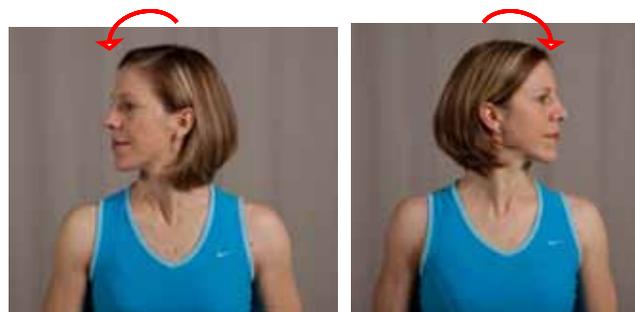


Lie on your back in a comfortable position for your head and neck with your knees bent. Place a small towel roll under the back of your neck for support.

Look at a spot on the wall just above your knees. Follow with a slow and gentle nod of your head as if you were saying 'yes' without increasing your symptoms. Hold the position for 10 seconds and repeat 10 times.

\*This exercise can also be done in sitting.

### Neck Turning



- o Sit in the correct postural position.
- o Gently turn your head from one side to the other.
- o Move as far as you can without making your symptoms worse.
- o Repeat 10 times to each side.

*Consult with your physical therapist or doctor if you experience an increase in your symptoms with recommended exercises, or if you develop new symptoms of numbness, tingling, or a spread of the pain. This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.*