

Dear Patient

# Neck Pain Arthritis

## WHY DOES ARTHRITIS CAUSE NECK PAIN ?

Neck Pain is a common condition seen in people of all ages and levels of fitness, although typically the incidence increases with increasing age. There are numerous causes of neck pain including poor posture or traumatic injury (such as whiplash), both of which may lead to arthritis and degeneration. The term "arthritis" means inflammation of the joints. If persistent, this inflammation causes irritation of the soft tissues and lining of the joints resulting in pain and stiffness.

Neck pain may also be associated with headaches and referred symptoms into the shoulder and arm to the fingers. Fortunately, there are many successful strategies available to treat neck pain with effectiveness of treatment and rate of recovery dependent upon cause, severity and duration of symptoms.

## ANATOMY

The main function of the neck is to provide support and mobility to the head. The neck is made up of seven vertebrae with a disc between all except the top two. Discs are mainly comprised of fibrous material that act as shock absorbers, evenly distributing the weight of the head through the neck. The muscles of the neck are constantly working to help hold up the head, whilst the bones house and protect the spinal cord. The neck is also very mobile making it highly susceptible to injury. Damage may occur to any of the structures in the neck including the joints, discs, muscles, nerves, ligaments and blood vessels.



Above: There are seven vertebrae in the neck, housing and protecting the spinal cord.

## DEGENERATIVE DISEASE

During the natural course of aging, degenerative changes occur in the structures of the cervical vertebrae. Discs may become more fibrous with a resultant decrease in elasticity causing a narrowing of the disc. Osteophytic growths (bony projections) may follow. More pressure is placed on the joints on either side of the vertebral bodies, or facet joints, leading to damage of the joint surfaces. Spinal stenosis or narrowing of the spinal canal can also arise where bony growths encroach into the spinal canal putting pressure on the spinal cord or individual nerve roots.

## TREATMENT

Although we are unable to reverse the aging process, physiotherapists aim to minimise pain whilst maximising function. In addition to a thorough assessment from your practitioner, further examinations such as X-rays, may be needed to fully identify the cause of the pain.

Treatment may consist of ice or heat, electrotherapy and joint mobilisations or manipulation. An exercise programme designed individually for your needs by your practitioner is also very important. This will aim to mobilise the affected vertebral region as well as strengthen the associated muscles so that stability in the region can be maximised, reducing irritation of the damaged structures.

## THERAPEUTIC PILLOW

A therapeutic pillow which is contoured to support both the neck and the head may also be of assistance.



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