

Dear Patient

# Neck Pain

## Wry Neck

Neck Pain is a common condition seen in people of all ages and levels of fitness, although typically the incidence increases with age. There are numerous causes of neck pain including poor posture, traumatic injury such as whiplash, arthritis and degeneration. 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

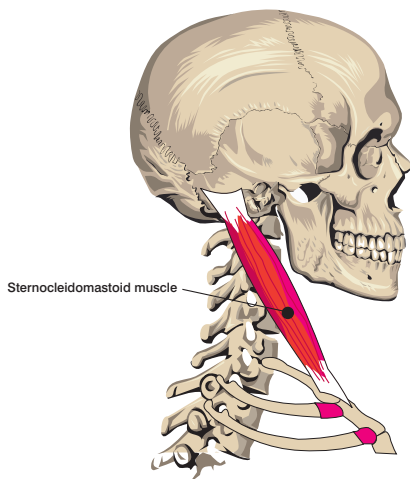
The main function of the neck is to provide support and mobility to the head.

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.

Wry Neck is a condition where the neck suddenly becomes stiff and painful.

- Pain is usually sharp and moderately severe.
- Pain may be felt anywhere in the neck extending into the head, shoulders and upper back, and is usually worse on one side.
- The muscles of the neck may feel very tight and the neck may be 'stuck' in an awkward position.
- It is often difficult to turn the head in one direction or look up as these movements produce 'catching' pain.
- Commonly, wry neck occurs after a quick movement of the head or upon waking, usually after having slept in an awkward position.



*When Sternocleidomastoid spasms, the head is rotated to the affected side and movement becomes very painful.*



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### CAUSE

Wry neck is a common injury recognised by pain on one side of the neck with difficulty turning the head towards the affected side. Pain is caused by injury to the small facet joints in the neck which become damaged when a force, prolonged or sudden, is applied to the joints. Occasionally, the neck "goes out" following a sudden turning or flicking motion of the head, but more commonly pain is noted on waking and no specific causal incident can be determined. In some cases, there has been exposure to cold wind, increased stress, or the individual has simply slept in an awkward position.

When injury to the facet joint occurs, the muscles around the neck go into spasm in an attempt to prevent further damage. The most powerful muscle spasm usually occurs in the sternocleidomastoid muscle which rotates the head to the affected side. Initially, pain is localized to the region of the damaged facet joint(s). As the spasm increases, the pain may become more diffuse, involving the shoulder and upper back on the affected side.

### TREATMENT

In most cases "wry neck" responds very well to treatment in 3 - 4 days. Treatment commonly consists of mobilisations or manipulation to loosen the joints, heat and electrotherapy to reduce pain and muscle spasm, and gentle stretches to restore full movement.

Your practitioner will determine the most appropriate treatment for you. Muscle relaxants or anti-inflammatory medications may also be prescribed by your doctor.

### HOME TREATMENT

- Keep the neck warm
- Use a hot pack on your neck for 15 minutes every 2 -3 hours or as often as possible
- Gently move your neck within the limits of pain
- Use pain relief medication as required

*Disclaimer : The material contained in these pages is intended as a guide only and does not constitute advice or treatment. For further information, please see your qualified health professional.*

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