

# MANAGING NECK PAIN

## Following Concussion/Mild Traumatic Brain Injury

Traumatic Brain Injury Center of Excellence



PATIENTS

### NECK PAIN FOLLOWING CONCUSSION

When you injured your head you may have injured the muscles and ligaments of your neck. Injury to neck structures can cause pain in the neck, ear or jaw. It can also cause muscle tightness, spasms, headache and decreased range of motion. Most people recover from neck pain quickly. This fact sheet provides useful tips on how to manage neck pain that you may experience after a concussion. Remember to always seek your health care provider's advice about your neck pain and its treatment options

### THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HELP RELIEVE NECK PAIN

#### 1. POSTURE:

How you hold your head and neck can cause painful muscle strain or make existing pain worse. Avoid doing the following:

- Don't stay in the same position for a long time. Take short breaks every 10–15 minutes.
- Pay attention to your arm and neck position while working. Try to maintain neutral neck and arm positions to decrease tension on your neck muscles.
- Don't bend your head down to read; bring the book up toward you.
- Adjust the distance to the monitor so you're not leaning forward to see.
- Sit facing forward, not sideways, in meetings, classes or while watching TV, so you are not turning your head.

#### 2. SLEEP POSITION:

- When sleeping on your back, place a small pillow under the nape of your neck.
- When sleeping on your side, use enough pillows to keep your neck in a straight line with your body.
- Don't sleep on your stomach with your head turned to the side.



#### 3. ICE OR HEAT:

- As a general rule, ice is better for more recent injuries and heat is better for more persistent pain, however, you can use whichever provides the most relief.
- Apply moist heat on your neck for 10–15 minutes while taking a shower or with a warmed towel or gel pack.
- You can either apply ice directly on your neck in a continuous stroke fashion for 5–7 minutes or by first placing it in a dry cloth and then leaving it on your neck for 15–20 minutes.
- Remember to inspect your skin for any heat or ice injury after each application.

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#### 4. NECK STRETCHES:

- It is best to perform these exercises when the muscles are warm, such as after applying heat.
- These exercises should be performed while sitting or standing on a firm supporting surface in an upright and erect position.
- Perform each stretch slowly, while making sure not to move your trunk or shoulders.
- Remember to breath normally and to not hold your breath.

##### Pull up:



- Look straight ahead with head level.
- Pull chin slowly forward toward chest.
- Bring head slowly up to level position.
- Hold 15–25 seconds when chin nearly rests on chest; relax; repeat 3 to 5 times.

##### Retract:



- Look straight ahead with head level.
- Pull chin straight back (like a turtle head retracting into its shell). Don't rock back and forth, or shrug shoulders.
- Bring head slowly forward until your neck is completely straight.
- Hold position for 15–25 seconds; relax; repeat 3 to 5 times.

##### Deeper stretch:



- Place your hand on chin and gently press chin back as you flatten your neck.
- Bring forehead slowly forward until you feel the stretch in the back of your neck maintaining mild resistance with your hand on chin.
- Hold position for 15–25 seconds; relax; repeat 3 to 5 times.

##### Flexion (chin to chest):



- Place hand on crown of head with head level.
- Push chin slowly forward and down toward chest. Keep back straight and don't roll shoulders forward.
- Hold 15–25 seconds when chin rests on chest; relax; repeat 3 to 5 times.

##### Lateral flexion (ear to shoulder):



- Look straight ahead with head level.
- Place hand at the crown, on far-side of head.
- Pull head gently sideways, bringing ear down toward shoulder.
- Hold stretch, and then slowly bring head back up to starting position. Repeat with arm on opposite side, toward other shoulder.

##### Rotation (turn):



- Look straight ahead with head level.
- Turn head slowly right until reaching full rotation, hold 15–25 seconds
- Turn head slowly back to middle start-position, relax.
- Rotate head to left full rotation, holding stretch 15 to 25 seconds; repeat 3 to 5 times.

##### For deeper stretch, perform neck rotation with hand on your chin:

- Turn head right as far as you can; do not drop chin forward.
- Use your hands to apply slight pressure to your head while you turn, feel the deeper stretch in your neck, hold 15–25 seconds; relax.
- Rotate head left full rotation while keeping resistance with left hand, hold 15–25 seconds; repeat 3 to 5 times.

If any of these stretches cause pain, stop them immediately and try repositioning. If pain or discomfort persists, contact your primary care provider or other health care professional.

To view a neck stretch video, scan the the QR code to the right or go to [youtu.be/POE6bij3Yh8](https://youtu.be/POE6bij3Yh8)

