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Simple Neck Exercises

This article focusses on quick, simple and easy neck exercises. The pictures and text below make it easy.

Neck Range Of Motion Exercises, Neck Exercises

One very powerful way of controlling your neck pain is to do daily range of motion exercises, putting your neck through full movement several times a day. This prevents stiffness developing and stretches all the attached muscles, making them less vulnerable to sudden demands.

Please note that exercises can make your pain worse as well as better so please consult the [simple exercise guidance](#) before getting on with them. If you have any doubts, please consult your physio, other manual therapist or medical practitioner.

These exercises are meant to maintain range of motion or regain loss of movement in the neck region and to help control pain. Regular performance of movements can help with pain problems. They are simple and not magical in any way. If you have long term neck pain with some disability these exercises may help mobility or allow you to tolerate more activity but may not be very effective against pain.

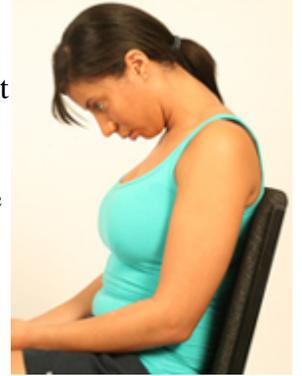
Do each movement slowly five times, resting a short time in between each set of movements. Do two or three times a day although more often can be useful. Work out how much you should do by slowly increasing the frequency until you are doing enough or start to have problems.

Neck flexion

This is the movement of bringing the head forward so that the chin hits the chest and your face is staring straight down at the floor. Do slowly five times.

This exercise stretches the structures at the back of the cervical spine, which are often kept in a tight position in normal day to day postures. They can then become shortened and stop the neck moving naturally.

To make this more difficult you can retract the neck slightly to start with (see below) and then flex the head forward, increasing the stretch on the neck.



Neck extension

This is the movement of allowing the head to go back until the face is looking directly at the ceiling. Don't do this movement fast or forcefully as it forces all the small joints at the back of the neck into an extreme position. This won't do them any harm but might increase your pain.

Allow your neck to ease back steadily as you do this, leaving your neck at the end of the movement for a few seconds.

NB If you feel dizzy when you do this leave it out. Dizziness, especially if you are older, might indicate that the blood vessels in your neck are being squeezed by the position.



Rotation

Turn your head slowly round to one side until it cannot easily go any further. Once you have done five to one side do the other. Do not go from one side to the other in the individual movements or roll your neck about.

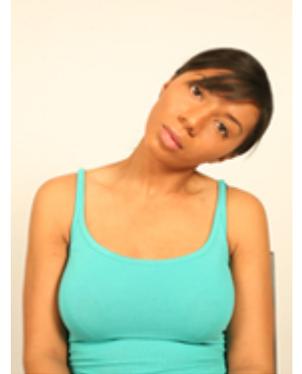
Hold your neck at the end of the movement for a few seconds as this is the most valuable part of the movement to maintain or increase your movement.

NB If you feel dizzy when you do this leave it out. Dizziness, especially if you are older, might indicate that the blood vessels in your neck are being squeezed by the position.

Side flexions

Keep your head facing straight forward and try and tip your ear down towards the same shoulder. It's difficult to do this well and without rotating to one side. She's doing pretty well in the picture, just lifting her chin up a little more than ideal.

This movement is quite severe on the neck joints so don't go hard at the exercise. Don't move from side to side in the movement as that stops you getting to the ends of the neck range and may aggravate your joints.



Neck Retraction (Chicken Tuck)

This is one of the most useful neck movements as it counteracts the tendency we all have of allowing our heads to poke forwards in a poor posture. She's showing the extreme position of "poking chin" here.

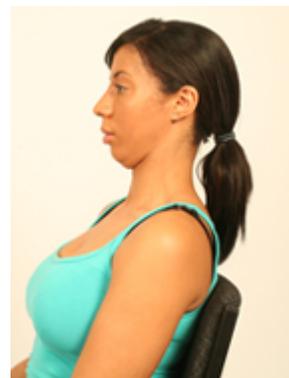
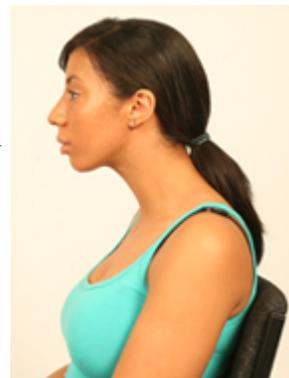
When we sit, which many of us do a lot of the time, we tend to slump and to keep our heads up so our eyes are horizontal we arch our necks backwards slightly

This gives a continual flexion (bending) posture to the lower neck and an extension (arching) posture to the upper neck. Over time the tissues can shorten and give us stiffness and pain. Typical pains are in the neck, upper shoulders, but this posture can also give you headaches.

Here's the end point of the movement. Keep your face straight on during the whole movement, drawing the head back and the chin down slightly.

If you get it right, you will look funny, rather like a sergeant-major in an exaggerated military neck posture. If you do it in public people will either laugh or give you funny looks!

The whole movement is like the forward and back movement that chickens make. Hold the movement at the extreme of the backward posture for a few seconds.



Upper Neck Nodding

This movement particularly moves the upper cervical joints. In our bad postural habits we tend to poke our chins forward which puts our upper neck joints into extension (arching).

The nodding movement flexes these joints and can help with upper neck pain and headaches of joint origin. This is the neutral starting position for the movement.

Lying flat on your back for this movement is the easiest way to start this movement. You can be flat on the surface like she is in the picture or have a pillow if you don't like your head down flat on a surface.

This is the end position of the exercise. Think of your head as a bowling ball which you rotate forward to rock the neck. You should not lift the head off the surface at all. You may feel a pull in the upper neck which is often tight.

This exercise should be done with caution as you could increase your pain if you push it too hard. When you get good at the movement you can do it standing up or sitting but it is harder to get the pure joint movement than in lying down.



Related movements which may be useful

When we have neck problems it is rarely just the neck which is the problem, the pain usually involves the thoracic spine and the shoulder girdle. It is good to do shoulder girdle exercises as well to loosen up this area.

1. **Shoulder shrugs**

Shrug your shoulders as far up as you easily can then downwards further than normal.

2. **Shoulder bracing (retraction)**

Bring your shoulders to the front as if you are trying to get them to meet at the middle then brace them right back, pulling your shoulder blades together. Make it a large, slow, repeated movement.