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Neck injury advice

***Information for
patients and carers***

**Accident and Emergency Department
Aberdeen Royal Infirmary**

About your neck injury

After a neck injury, you may have pain and stiffness. Pain in particular may develop just hours after your injury occurred. This pain and any later stiffness are likely to get worse during the first couple of days but will gradually get better. However, it may take time.

The good news is that most people recover fully from the injury within a few days or weeks, with no lasting problems. Most of the pain and stiffness should start to ease in about 5 to 7 days.

What can I do to treat myself?

Control your pain

It's important to take painkillers regularly to reduce the pain and help you keep mobile.

Paracetamol and ibuprofen are effective painkillers if taken regularly. We don't routinely prescribe or dispense these as you can easily buy them over the counter at chemists and in many other shops.

Please read the instructions on the packets carefully for the dosage. Please also check if there are reasons why you might not be able to take these medications. Your family doctor (GP) or pharmacist can advise you.

Use an ice pack

Some people find cold helps. You can use ice, a cold pack, or frozen peas wrapped in a towel, applied for 15 to 20 minutes to the affected area several times a day. Remember that you can get an ice burn; it should not feel uncomfortable.

Use heat

72 hours after your injury, you might find heat helpful too.

A hot bath/shower, hot water bottle or heat pack (wrapped in a towel) can help reduce pain, muscle spasm and stiffness. This should be comfortable and not burn your skin. You can apply heat for 15 to 20 minutes several times a day.

Don't use a collar

These are not recommended as they have been shown to slow your recovery.

Do your exercises

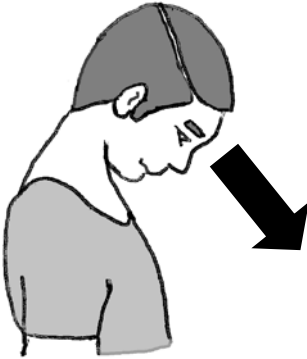
Do the exercises on the following pages at least 4 times every day.

Exercise within your “pain free range” – don't force through the pain, only do what is comfortable for you.

Make sure you're sitting up and comfortable before starting the exercises.

Exercises you can do

Exercise 1



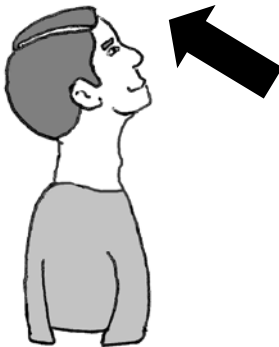
Bend your head forwards until you feel a stretch behind your neck.

Return to your starting position.

Repeat 3 to 5 times.

Stop if you have pain.

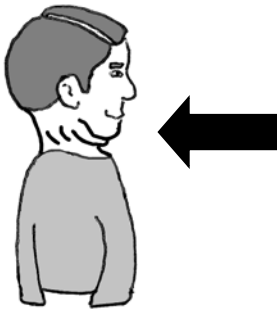
Exercise 2



Bend your head backwards as far as is comfortable.

Repeat 3 to 5 times.

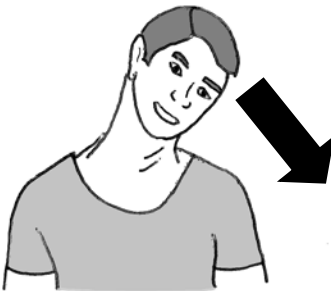
Exercise 3



Straighten up, then tuck your chin in to make a double chin, then relax.

Repeat 5 times.

Exercise 4

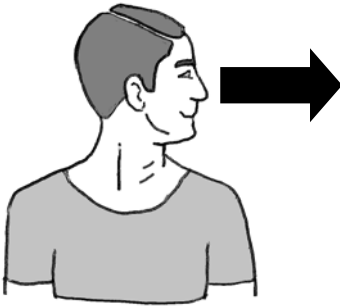


Look straight ahead. Tilt your head towards one shoulder (try to touch your ear down to your shoulder) until you feel the stretch in the opposite side.

Repeat to other side.

Repeat 3 to 5 times.

Exercise 5



Turn your head to one side to look over your shoulder until you feel a stretch. Repeat to other side.

Repeat 3 to 5 times.

When you're in bed

When lying in bed, always sleep on your back or on your side, **never face down**. A firm bed is best.

Sleeping on your back

When sleeping on your back, place a rolled up tea towel at the back of your neck as this may help you feel more comfortable.

If you sleep on your side:

Make sure your head and neck are in line with the rest of your spine (see picture on next page).

Only use enough pillows to keep your head straight.

Make sure that the arm you're lying on is kept in front of you.

When sleeping on your side

	
Correct: Firm bed and head straight, in line with your back.	Incorrect: Pillow is too thick and pushing your head up.

	
Correct: Arm in correct position, in front of your chest.	Incorrect: Pillow is too thin and making your head drop.

Contact numbers

If you've any questions about your treatment please call:

Emergency Department
Aberdeen Royal Infirmary

 **01224 553306 or 550506**

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Other formats and languages can be
supplied on request. Please call Quality
Development on 01224 554149 for a copy.
Ask for leaflet 1098.**

Feedback from the public helped us to develop this leaflet.
If you have any comments on how we can improve it,
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