



Neck Care

A Guide to Management



Contents

Introduction	3
Tips to Minimise Pain	4
Posture	5
Standing Posture	6
Sitting Posture	7-8
Sitting at a Desk or Table	9
Driving Posture	9
Lying Posture	10-11
Contact Details	12

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Illustrations by Nicola Neutze

Introduction

Recovering from neck pain can be a slow process, especially for those with chronic neck conditions. What you do during the day (and night) will affect how quickly you recover.

Please speak with your health care professional if you have any queries.

Tips to Minimise Pain

Here are some management ideas to prevent your pain getting worse, to aid recovery and to minimise further bouts of pain:

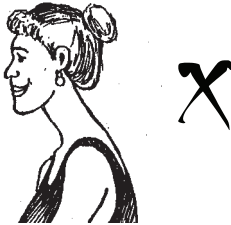
- » Avoid carrying heavy objects including overful handbags.
- » Avoid strenuous pushing, pulling and lifting activities with your arms.
- » Avoid quick head movements.
- » Do not lie in the bath for too long as this bends the head and neck forward too much.
- » While your neck is painful, do not reach above head height, e.g. avoid putting washing on an outside clothes line - use an indoor portable one.
- » Do not sleep in a chair, recliner or in cars.
- » If neck muscles start to ache try a hot pack (available from chemists) to ease muscle strain.
- » Neck exercises are extremely important in relieving pain, gaining flexibility and strengthening neck muscles. When you are pain free, continue your exercises daily to maintain range of movement and good posture. This will decrease the change of your pain re-occurring.

Posture

It is essential to maintain good posture in your neck and the whole of your spine. Poor back posture leads to poor neck posture, which leads to pain.

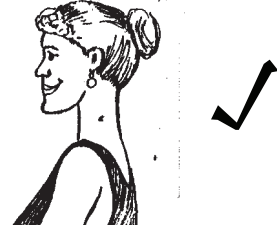
People with neck pain often spend too much time with their head and neck too far forward.

Poor Neck Posture



- » droopy shoulders
- » shoulders back
- » neck forward

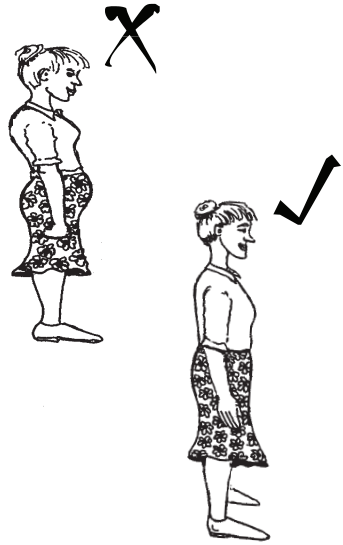
Good Neck Posture



- » chin tucked in
- » head down

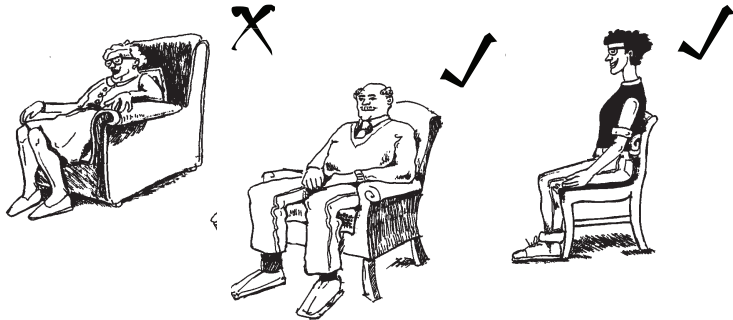
Standing Correctly

- » Weight evenly distributed over both feet, just in front of the heels.
- » Don't over-straighten (or lock) your knees.
- » Tighten your stomach muscles slightly.
- » Shoulders relaxed, but back and down.
- » Chin tucked in slightly.
- » Think 'stand tall'.
- » Don't slouch.



Sitting Correctly

- » Use a firm chair that has a straight back.
- » Sit as far back as possible in the chair.
- » Use a lumbar support (eg rolled towel or foam roll) in the small of the back to help maintain the curve in your back.
- » Don't slouch.
- » Hips and knees should be at right angles.
- » Feet flat on the floor – you may need to put your feet on a low stool.
- » Distribute weight evenly over both feet.



Other Hints

- » Avoid deep couches.
- » Don't sit for too long – get up regularly and move around.
- » If you find you have been sitting poorly, stop what you are doing and adjust your posture.
- » Avoid working too long with your neck bent.

Sitting

Take regular short breaks and do the exercises shown by your physiotherapist. When reading support the book on a cushion or table.



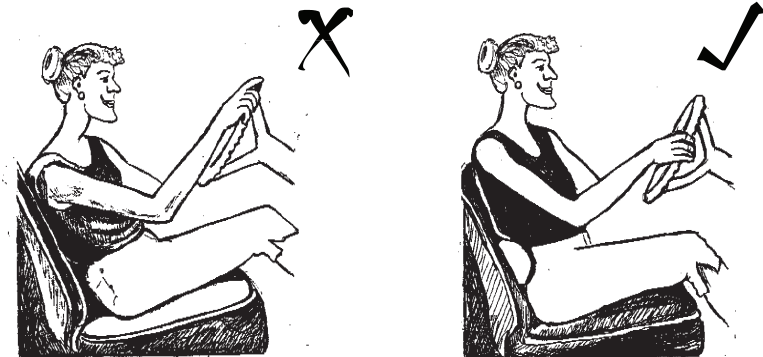
Sitting at a Desk

When sitting at a desk, sit close to the desk to help maintain good posture. The desk should be at the correct height – e.g. when writing, the forearms should be horizontal with the surface of the desk.



Sitting in the Car

- » Sit close to the steering wheel.
- » Try using a lumbar roll.
- » If your hips are bent too much, try sitting on a small cushion or folded towel.
- » Interrupt long journeys by stopping and walking for a few minutes.



Lying

Some people wake in the morning with neck pain and stiffness which was not there the night before. The cause may be poor sleep posture or a poor pillow.

When lying on your side, the head should NOT be tilted up or down - it should be level with the rest of the body.



Avoid placing your pillow under your shoulder.



To give your neck more support when lying on the side try:



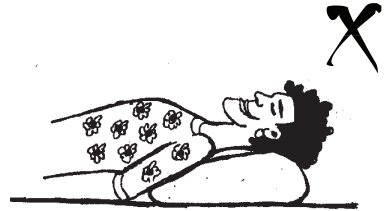
Placing a small foam roll inside the pillow case, on top of the pillow.



Placing a small rolled towel inside the pillow case, under the pillow.

Lying

When lying on your back do not place the pillow under your shoulders.



In this position, the pillow supports the natural curve of your spine.



Bring in your usual pillow for the physiotherapist to check.

Experiment to find out what is most comfortable for you. Various pillows can be tried at the Independent Living Centre.



An Australian Government Initiative

Resthaven Therapy Services

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For more information about this and other services offered by Resthaven, visit:

www.resthaven.asn.au

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