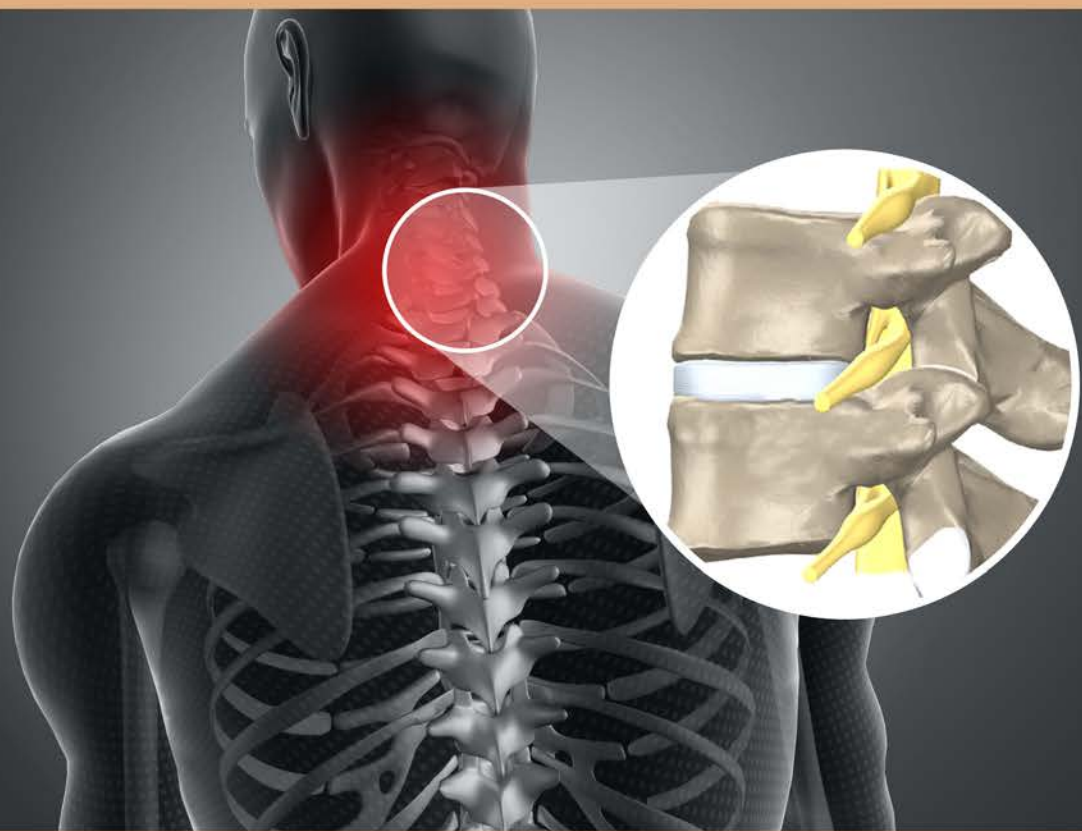


Alleviate that nagging pain without medication!

8 Tips to Help You Help Yourself with that **NECK PAIN**



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Optimize Your Body's Everyday Performance.

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Foreword:

Neck and/or head pain can really put a strain in your day. Let's face it, who can genuinely carry on their normal daily activities with a smile on their face when their neck or head are causing them constant grief? Nobody! If only there were some easy, at-home treatments you could do yourself to relieve your own head and neck pain. There are! Below are eight easy treatment techniques that you can use yourself for your aching head and neck, which will definitely ease your discomfort and put the smile back on your face. After all, you have nothing to lose by giving them a try (except pain, of course!)

1) Give Yourself a Massage

Self-massage is a marvelous way to ease muscle tension that is causing a pain in the head and neck. Find your sorest spot and rub away! Having perfect technique is not tremendously important, but pressure is. Massage only as hard as is comfortable. Pain is not a gain in this case! Five, ten, or 15 minutes can do the trick but longer is helpful too if time (and finger strength) allows.

Even better than self-massage would be enlisting a good friend or family member to do the job, which will allow you to simply relax your muscles and enjoy! Try massaging the temples, the muscles of the jaw, the muscles at the base of your skull, or those on the tops of the shoulders. Any spot that feels like it needs the massage is generally safe (and helpful) to get into. A scalp massage can do wonders for head and neck pain as well. Remember it has to feel good in order to be doing good!

2) Apply Heat

A warm pack (microwaveable or a heating pad) can make head and neck pain melt like butter. The trick is to get the pack or pad to conform to your neck in order to get the most out of the warmth. Smaller warm packs can be placed on the jaw or temples to ease tension here. Ice can work too, but most people with neck or head pain prefer the comforting relief of heat. 10-15 minutes is enough depending on the size of the area you are heating.

Don't use anything too hot and be sure to set a timer as it can be so relaxing that before you know it you will be drifting off into a dreamlike state and hours will pass as minutes do!

3) Give Yourself Some Traction

Our poor joints, muscles and other structures of the neck are constantly under the pressure of gravity. Every structure is getting compressed all day, every day whenever we are upright! Self-traction can relieve the constant pressure and liberate important compressed structures like joints and nerves, which eases pain.

Cupping your palms under your skull and pulling it in the upward direction (kind of like you are trying to pull your head off!) provides effective traction. Rolling up a towel up and hooking it under the back of your skull (close to your ears), and then pulling upward on the towel also provides a traction force. Both techniques can be done in sitting or lying but lying provides the most relief to your muscles.

Don't pull too hard! When we said you are trying to pull your head off, that is only to give you an idea of direction, not force! Think rather about your head as an egg, and you are trying to lift it up without breaking it. As soon as you feel a bit of the tension ease from your neck, stop! Hold for a bit. Release. Repeat. Even a three to ten minutes of self-traction a day can do wonders to ease your discomfort.

4) Give Yourself a Break

Resting for a bit can help your neck and head pain immensely. Rest?? Who has time to rest, you ask? Well a rest might simply mean getting out of that same position you sit in all day in front of the computer for just a few minutes, or it might mean relaxing on the couch and leaning your head back comfortably to take the weight of your head off your neck. Lying down is the penultimate in giving the head and neck a break. Resting for a few minutes to an hour or two will make an impact. Whatever time you can afford, lend it to your head and neck!

You can make the most of your resting time by also incorporating some deep breathing, which helps to relax all those tight muscles that might be putting pressure on the head and neck. Close your eyes and take a deep breath that feels like it is going all the way down to your belly (breath in through your nose). Then purse your lips (make them like you are sucking on a straw) and slowly blow the air out of your mouth. Repeat this 3 times. Can you feel the tension releasing from your head and neck as you do this? Well done!

5) Sleep With a Pillow That Provides Good Support

A single pillow that conforms to the contours of your neck while you sleep will do wonders for your neck and head pain.

Sleep is meant to be a time to rejuvenate and rest the body so you wake up mentally and physically ready to take on the next day. If you wake up with an aching neck, you've missed the point! By using either a specialty foam pillow that can mold to your neck or a firm feather pillow, you can ensure the hollow in your neck is filled with something supportive while you sleep. This will give your neck muscles a rest and ease your pain. Train yourself to pull your pillow up into the hollow of your neck anytime you briefly wake up or roll into a new position.

An additional tip just for you!... Avoid sleeping flat on your stomach if you can. This position stretches the neck into a severe range of motion, which isn't that terrible for a short bit, but a longer period during sleep will unquestionably contribute to further head and neck discomfort by the time the rooster crows!

6) Position Yourself Well At All Times... Or At Least As Often As You Can Remember To!

Yes, yes, that ol' 'posturing' rhetoric again! Posture wouldn't get so much airtime if it weren't so important! We all know it is virtually impossible to keep good posturing all of the time, but what about most of the time? Or at least whenever you can remember it?!

Good posturing for the head and neck means keeping your head aligned on top of your neck and keeping your neck aligned over the middle of your upper body. Don't let your chin poke out in front of your face, like you would do if you were trying to get closer to a computer screen without pulling your chair in. Secondly, keep your shoulders out of that slouched position your mother warned you about whenever you can! But don't pull your shoulders back into a military posture either or a new pain in your upper back will start to overshadow your neck pain! A position halfway between slouched and military posturing is perfect.

The real truth is that any sustained position is really not that great for the body, or for that aching neck! The body is designed to move. Motion is lotion for our highly complex bodies; so when you don't need to be sitting or standing or working in one position, GET MOVING!

7) Check With Your Dentist

Why the Dentist? He's the best person to determine if you are grinding your teeth at night. All the Physical Therapy or self-treatment in the world will be fruitless if

you go to sleep every night and re-create head and neck tension from grinding your teeth together.

Grinding, also known as bruxism, tightens the muscles in your jaw, temples and upper neck. Your pillow partner might be able to tell you whether they hear you grinding at night or you may be able to see some wear on your back teeth, but your Dentist will have the best opinion. A night guard often does the trick to alleviate the grinding and in-turn ease that head and neck pain.

8) Seek the Knowledge Of Your Physical Therapist

You will surely alleviate some of your head and neck pain with the above tips, but what about getting rid of it for good? Physical Therapists are highly trained in assessing and treating head and neck pain and can look at your situation specifically to determine what is causing your problem. They can even treat your temporomandibular joint if the main problem is coming from there! Their hands-on techniques as well as advice tailored just for you can not just alleviate your head or neck pain but can often get rid of it for good. You can expect your Physical Therapist to ask very explicit questions regarding your situation and pain, and then follow that with some specialized hands-on evaluation techniques to help determine the cause of your pain. The next course of action will be for them to treat you using hands-on techniques and/or electrical or other modalities. They will finish up by prescribing the best specific exercises to take away your pain and get you back moving comfortably and with ease.

If you have nagging discomfort in your head or neck make it a priority to book an appointment with one of the talented Physical Therapists at Ironhorse Physical Therapy.

Extra, Extra! Read All About It!

Added information about that Nagging Head & Neck Pain... What Could Be Causing It?

So you have managed to alleviate your head and/or neck pain... well done! Now wouldn't it be nice to know what exactly was causing that terrible discomfort?

Your local Physical Therapist at Ironhorse Physical Therapy is the best person to help

You diagnose the cause of your pain, but while you are waiting to see them, why not have a read below about some of the more common causes of head and neck pain and see if one applies to you?

1) Neck Tension

A lot of neck and head pain comes simply from tense muscles in your neck and shoulders. Our poor little necks have to support our big skulls all day! This tension often develops from sustained postures, such as sitting at a computer for long hours, or other repetitive postures or activities. An example is a factory worker sitting or standing and doing the same repetitive task day in and day out, hour by hour. Muscle tension makes the muscles of the neck and upper shoulders feel tender and hard or tight to the touch. Ouch!

Neck pain caused by muscular tension is felt most often when you are actually in the sustained posture or in the process of doing the repetitive activity. Unfortunately this pain in the neck can also get worse over time so it might only be felt later in the day or even the next day.

Don't stress yourself out! Stress can make tension pain worse so keep those pressures of life in check. Ongoing tension or stress can also lead to a tension headache.

See Patient Guide to Headaches.

2) Mechanical neck pain- A 'Kink' in Your Neck

Ever simply woke up with a sore neck? Sometimes you get a 'kink' in your neck and moving a certain way just keeps causing you pain. This is called mechanical neck pain because the mechanics of the neck just aren't working right! The culprit of this type of neck pain is a stiff or stuck joint in the neck but can also be an injured ligament or a strained neck muscle. This pain is felt more on one side than the other.

3) Cervicogenic Headaches

Life in general can sometimes create a headache but a cervicogenic type of headache is caused from an underlying problem in your neck, which in-turn then

causes a headache. You might have a mechanical dysfunction with the muscles, joints, nerves or discs in your neck and this dysfunction results in a headache.

Ever had to do that really long car or plane ride and ended up with a headache once you arrive? This is a cervicogenic headache! They are usually felt on one side of your head and are brought on from having to keep your head or neck in a compromised position, which puts pressure on the structures in your neck, which subsequently causes that aching head.

See Patient Guide to Headaches.

4) Osteoarthritis of the Neck (Spondylosis)

Yes, it's true. With each passing day we all get a bit older. And with aging comes some wear and tear on our body, including the neck. This wear and tear is called osteoarthritis or spondylosis.

Wear and tear affects the joints of the neck as well as the discs that are between the vertebrae in the neck. As the joints wear and tear they don't glide and move as smoothly as they used to and this causes pain. A disc that is wearing out can cause pressure on nerves in the area, which in-turn also causes neck pain. If the pressure on a nerve is really severe, it will even cause pain that radiates down into your arm.

5) Problems with Your Jaw (Temporomandibular Joint)

Chew, chew, chew. You just have to chew your food! But what if chewing causes you head pain or a headache? For many people, this is the case. Problems with your temporomandibular joint, or TMJ, causes head pain mainly due to the large muscles near the temples that help to move your jaw. Overworking these muscles leads to muscle tension and can also instigate a headache. Misaligned teeth or grinding (bruxism) at night may be the start of a problem with your TMJ, so a trip to your friendly, neighbourhood Dentist in order to get to the 'root' of your jaw problem, may be necessary.

See Patient Guide to Temporomandibular Joint Problems.

6) Whiplash

What comes to mind when you think of whiplash? A car accident, of course! It is true that this is one of the most common ways to sustain a whiplash injury. What most people don't know, however, is that whiplash can occur even without having

a motor vehicle accident (MVA). Just a simple missed step, a knock down in sport, or an unexpected push while out in public can result in that whipping action of your head and neck. Our necks are not designed for whipping! This force, great or small, injures the structures of the neck and creates that ongoing pain in the neck.

7) Concussion

Thank goodness for those natural hard helmets that we all walk around wearing every day (our skulls). Our poor brains wouldn't stand a chance in life without it! Unfortunately the brain can still get knocked around a fair bit within the skull and when it does, we suffer a concussion.

If the head or body are hit with extreme force then the head can either take a direct hit, which bruises the brain, or the head can whip around and the brain effectively bounces against the inside of the skull which causes injury to the brain. Sometimes with a knock to the head you are lucky enough to just sustain a goose egg, which decreases in size (and pain) within a short time, but any widespread pain in the head, or symptoms such as nausea, light sensitivity or visual disturbances after knocking the skull or after the head gets whipped around means you means you have suffered a concussion!

Finale

So now you have 8 easy ways for you to alleviate that nagging pain in your neck or head all on your own. You might even be able to determine what exactly is causing your pain by referring to the extra information provided above.

There is no better way to confirm what EXACTLY is causing your pain and to get DEFINITE relief from it than by contacting your highly qualified Physical Therapist at Ironhorse Physical Therapy. They can get you on your way to alleviating your pain for good! So what are you waiting for? Come on in or call and book an appointment at Ironhorse Physical Therapy next time you are in our 'neck' of the woods.