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Acute Neck Pain

Cause:

Sudden onset of neck pain is common. It can occur at any age, including young children. There are many causes, but all create an inflammatory reaction in the local soft tissues. As the inflammatory reaction increases so might your symptoms for up to 3 days. During this time gently move your neck from side to side, up and down and turn to the left and right within a pain free range. Repeat each movement 2-3 times as pain permits.

Symptoms:

- Local pain around the neck
- Can affect and limit movement around the neck
- Can be associated to headache type symptoms

Red Flags (contact your doctor/ physio immediately)

- Difficulty controlling your bladder or bowels
- Poor balance or co-ordination, such as tripping or dragging your feet
- Fainting or feeling dizzy
- Difficulty using your arms normally or in a co-ordinated fashion
- Difficulty swallowing or breathing.

Treatment:

- Heat or ice can ease the pain and help reduce muscle tension. Use a microwavable bean bag and place around the neck for the instructed time.
- Pain relief - ask your pharmacist for advice regarding pain management.
- Prolonged postures - try to avoid prolonged periods of sitting at a computer, bending over or driving. Be aware of your sitting posture.
- Ask for an ergonomic assessment of your workspace and you may be eligible for alterations or new equipment.
- Avoid carrying heavy loads – split in to several smaller bags
- Avoid carrying heavy handbags or laptop bags on shoulders.
- Try changing pillows - keep your head in line with your spine when you are on your side. Avoid sleeping on your stomach.

Posture plays a large part in both the cause of neck pain, but also the recovery. Rather like cuts need to be kept in a good position to heal so do necks. As the pain settles, try sitting in a chair against a wall or put your head gradually nearer to your headrest keeping your chin tucked in. This should not hurt.

Most people recover without the need for treatment, but if you have had several episodes of neck pain seek the advice of a physio who will assess why you are getting neck pain and help you strengthen up the supporting muscles around the neck. If you experience headaches, pins and needles or numbness in the arms or legs it is best to seek the help of a physio as these symptoms often need treatment to help them settle.