

Neck

Exercises

for a Healthy Neck



Your 15 - Minute Workout

Why Do Neck Exercises?

Most people have neck pain or discomfort at some time in their lives. Neck exercises can help relieve this pain and stiffness. They also aid in recovery from an injury. And exercises help you keep your neck strong and flexible.

Why Your Neck Hurts

Neck pain can be due to many causes. These include:

- Stress, strain, and overuse
- Poor posture (how you hold your body) and body mechanics (ways of moving)
- Weakened muscles and joints
- Accident or injury



A Neck Exercise Program That Works

Doing neck exercises can improve the strength and flexibility of the muscles in your neck, shoulders, and upper back. This helps support your neck, improves circulation, and reduces pain. The exercises in this booklet take just 15 or 20 minutes total to do. They can help you relax, improve your posture, and increase your neck's strength and range of motion.

Exercise Tips

- Talk to your healthcare provider before starting an exercise program, especially if you have a history of neck problems.
- Expect some soreness at first. If pain worsens, stop the exercise and check with your healthcare provider.
- Pace yourself. Start slow and work up to more vigorous exercise.
- Breathe slowly and deeply.
- Stretch slowly. Don't jerk or bounce.
- Exercise regularly, as directed by your healthcare provider.

Know Your Neck

A healthy neck supports the head, keeping it aligned with the rest of your spine. When the neck's bones, disks, and muscles are in good condition, they allow you to move your head freely and without pain.

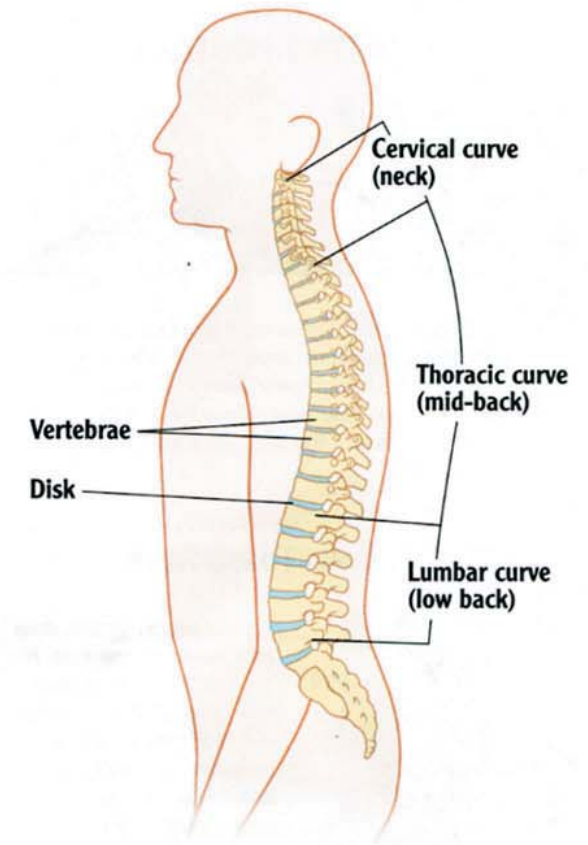
Your Spine's Three Natural Curves

The spine is arranged in three curves: **cervical** (neck), **thoracic** (mid-back), and **lumbar** (low back). When they are properly aligned, these curves support your weight comfortably. The curves are maintained when you are relaxed and your ears, shoulders, and hips are in a straight line. This is called a **neutral position**.

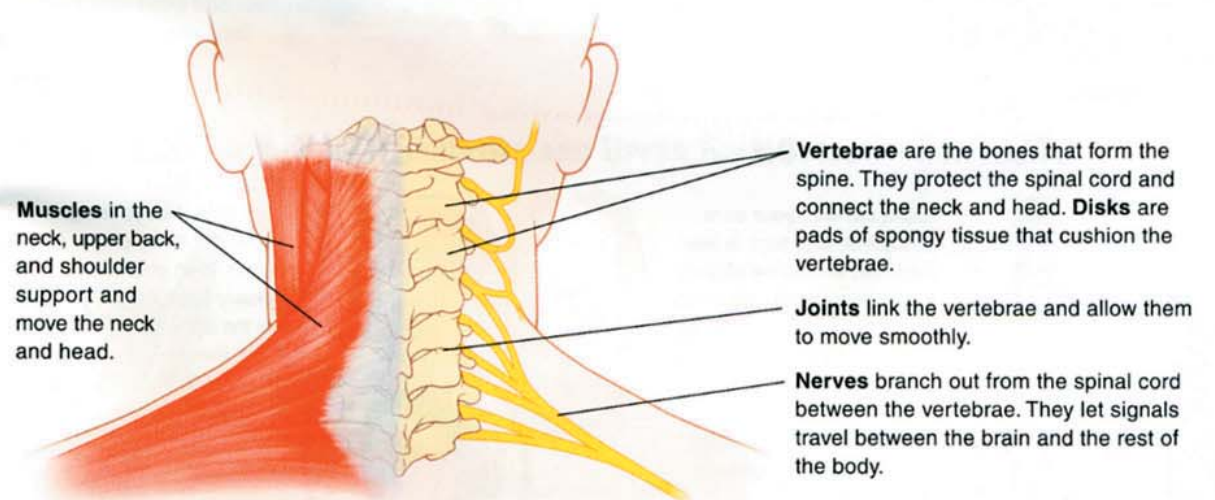
Moving Your Neck

A healthy neck can move easily, without discomfort. The neck moves in three basic ways. During:

- **Flexion and extension**, the head moves forward and backward.
- **Rotation**, the head turns left and right.
- **Lateral bending**, the head tilts, ear toward the shoulder.



Parts of the Neck



Muscles in the neck, upper back, and shoulder support and move the neck and head.

Vertebrae are the bones that form the spine. They protect the spinal cord and connect the neck and head. **Disks** are pads of spongy tissue that cushion the vertebrae.

Joints link the vertebrae and allow them to move smoothly.

Nerves branch out from the spinal cord between the vertebrae. They let signals travel between the brain and the rest of the body.

Your 15-Minute Neck Exercise Program

This short workout includes both stretching and strengthening exercises. Do the workout as often as suggested by your healthcare provider. Use an exercise mat, pillow, or folded towel to support your head and to protect sensitive areas such as your knees.

LYING

STARTING POSITION



Lie on your back, knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Keep your ears, shoulders, and hips aligned, but don't press your lower back to the floor. Rest your hands on your pelvis. Breathe deeply and relax. Return to this position after each exercise in this set.

NECK (DORSAL) GLIDE



Gently flatten the curve of your neck against the floor. Lengthen your neck as though you're growing taller. Don't jam your chin into your chest, and don't push too hard. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 3 or ____ times.

PASSIVE NECK ROTATION



With your neck relaxed, place the palm of one hand on your forehead. Use your hand to turn your head from side to side until you feel a stretch in the neck muscles. Keep your shoulders on the floor and your chin in a neutral position. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 5 or ____ times.

ACTIVE NECK ROTATION



Use your neck muscles to turn your head from side to side until you feel a stretch in the muscles. Keep your shoulders on the floor. Don't lift your chin as you turn your head. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 5 or ____ times.

LYING

NECK AND TORSO ROTATION



From starting position, drop both knees to one side. At the same time, turn your head and look in the other direction. Keep both feet in contact with the floor and keep your arms at your sides. Hold for 5 seconds. Then slowly switch sides. Repeat 5 or ____ times.

HEAD CLOCK



Imagine facing a clock. With your nose, slowly trace the outer edge of the clock. Move clockwise first, then counterclockwise. Repeat 3 or ____ times.

ARM LIFTS



Raise one arm overhead, then lower it. As you lower that arm, raise the other arm. Continue to move both arms in slow, smooth arcs. Keep your arms straight and your head and neck relaxed. Repeat 5 or ____ times with each arm.

ARM AND UPPER BODY CIRCLE



Lie on your right side, knees bent. Support your head with a pillow to keep your neck in line with the rest of your spine. Lie with your left knee slightly in front of the right knee, right hand on your left knee. Slowly move your left arm in a circle. Repeat 5 or ____ times. Reverse direction. Switch sides.

STANDING

STARTING POSITION



Stand tall with your ears, shoulders, and hips in line. Your feet should be slightly apart, positioned just under your hips. Focus your eyes directly in front of you. Stand in this position for a few seconds before starting your exercises. This helps increase your awareness of proper posture.

SHOULDER CLOCK



Imagine that your right shoulder is the center of a clock. With your shoulder slowly trace the outer edge of the clock. Move clockwise first, then counterclockwise. Repeat 3 or ____ times. Switch shoulders.

SHOULDER AND UPPER BACK STRETCH



Reach overhead and slightly back with both arms.



With your palms facing the ceiling, turn your fingers inward. Take a deep breath.



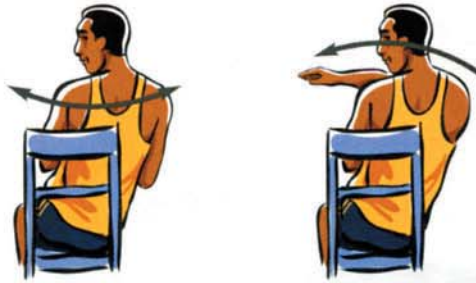
Breathe out and lower your elbows toward your buttocks. Keep your shoulders and neck aligned and your elbows behind your shoulders. Hold for 5 seconds, then return to starting position. Repeat 3 or ____ times.

STARTING POSITION



Sit in a chair with your feet flat on the floor. Your weight should be slightly forward so that you're balanced evenly on your buttocks. Relax your shoulders, keep your head level, and maintain your three natural curves. Using a chair with arms may help you keep your balance.

NECK ROTATION WITH WEIGHT SHIFT



Step 1. Shift your weight onto your right hip and look over your left shoulder. Hold for 3 seconds. Switch sides. Repeat 5 or ___ times.

Step 2. As you turn, reach your right arm across your body. Hold for 3 seconds. Switch sides. Repeat 5 or ___ times.

NECK FLEX



Rest the back of your left hand against your lower back. Place your right palm on the top of your head. Gently pull your head forward and down until you feel a stretch in the neck muscles. Don't force the motion. Hold for 20 seconds, then return to starting position. Switch arms.

SIDE BEND



Rest the back of your left hand against your lower back. Place your right palm just above your left ear. Gently pull your head to the right until you feel a stretch in the neck muscles. Hold for 20 seconds, then return to starting position. Do the exercise again, this time pulling your head forward diagonally. Switch sides.

SHOULDER GIRDLE STRETCH



Place one hand on the outside elbow of the other arm. Pull the arm across your body. Hold for 20 seconds. Switch sides.

SHOULDER ISOMETRICS



Raise your arms, elbows bent, to shoulder height. Slowly move your forearms together. Hold for 5 seconds. Return to starting position. Repeat 5 or ___ times.

SHOULDER SQUEEZE



Raise your arms with your elbows bent, upper arms at or just below shoulder level. Your palms should face forward. Move your arms back, squeezing your shoulder blades together. Hold 5 seconds. Return to starting position. Repeat 5 or ___ times.

NECK ISOMETRICS



Step 1. Press your palm against your forehead. Resist with your neck muscles. Hold for 5 seconds. Relax. Repeat 5 or ___ times.

Step 2. Do the exercise again, pressing on the side of your head. Repeat 5 or ___ times. Switch sides.

Step 3. Do the exercise again, pressing on the back of your head. Repeat 5 or ___ times.

STARTING POSITION



Move to your hands and knees. Keep your knees under your hips and your hands under your shoulders. Keep your spine in a neutral position (not arched or sagging). Keep your ears in line with your shoulders. Hold for a few seconds before starting your exercises.

HEAD LIFTS



Keeping your back straight, slowly drop your chin toward your chest. Tuck in your chin. Hold for 5 seconds. Then lift your head until your neck is level with your back. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 5 or ___ times.

REACH AND HOLD



Step 1. Tighten your abdominal muscles and raise one hand straight in front of you, palm down. Hold for 5 seconds, then lower. Repeat 5 or ___ times.
Step 2. Do the exercise again, this time lifting your arm to the side. Repeat 5 or ___ times.
Step 3. Do the exercise again, this time lifting your arm backward, palm up. Repeat 5 or ___ times. Switch sides and do the exercise with the other arm.

MOVING AEROBICALLY

Aerobic exercise conditions the heart and lungs, and tones muscles. It helps you control your weight. And it improves your body's natural pain-control system. All of this helps keep your neck and back in good shape. Types of aerobic exercise include walking, swimming, bicycling, water aerobics, and others. Choose one or choose a combination to fit your mood and the season. Aim for at least 20 minutes of aerobic exercise 3 to 5 times a week.

Keeping Your Neck in Mind

Doing these neck exercises regularly can help you reduce pain, stiffness, and fatigue. As you work, rest, or play, keep your neck in mind. Practice better posture to reduce your aches and pains so that you'll feel better each day.



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