

WHAT A PAIN IN THE NECK!



5 STEPS to identifying and treating cervical spine problems

THE NECK is comprised of seven cervical vertebrae starting at the base of your skull. It is a remarkable and complex apparatus. It supports your heavy — up to 12 pounds! — head, and allows it to move in multiple directions. Ligaments, tendons, muscles, bones, cartilage, and nerves are all bundled within this small space, which makes the cervical spine prone to pain caused by injury or wear and tear.



1 SYMPTOMS OF NECK PROBLEMS

Neck problems don't always cause just neck pain. Because of nerve involvement, cervical issues can also cause pain in your arms or hands, even down your back. **Common symptoms are:**

- > Stiff or sore neck
- > Sharp or shooting pain in a specific area of your neck
- > Tingling, numbness, or weakness in your shoulders, arms, or hands—with or without neck pain
- > Radiating pain from neck to shoulder, shoulder blade, arm, or hand
- > Headache
- > Frequently dropping objects
- > Unexplained falls (common symptom of spinal cord compression)

COMMON CAUSES OF NECK PAIN

A **TEMPORARY** strain or sprain of the neck can be caused by:

- > **Trauma:** Neck pain caused by whiplash is the No. 1 injury in auto accidents.
- > **Sleeping:** Spending the night in the wrong position can leave you with a sore neck.
- > **Posture:** Your neck suffers when you work at the computer, slouch, sit for too long, or constantly look down at your smartphone.



LASTING neck pain is often caused by structural problems in the cervical spine, including:

- > **Osteoarthritis**, which causes the cartilage to deteriorate
- > **Degenerative disc disease**, which dehydrates the gel-like substance in your discs, causing them to bulge
- > **Herniated discs** are displaced when the cushioning gel leaks out, allowing the disc to pinch a nerve
- > **Cervical radiculopathy** is pain caused by the compression or irritation of nerves in the neck
- > **Spondylolisthesis** causes facet joints to disintegrate
- > **Cervical spinal stenosis** is a weakening that causes the spinal column to narrow

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WHEN SHOULD YOU SEEK HELP?

If pain doesn't go away in two weeks, worsens, or interferes with activities of daily life, see your primary care physician to assess your condition and refer you to a specialist if needed. If you have been diagnosed with a spine condition, such as those listed above, a neurosurgeon is best suited to help you understand your treatment options.

SERIOUS SYMPTOMS

When the spinal cord is squeezed — either as the result of a trauma, such as a car accident, or from normal wear and tear — it can cause a condition called spinal cord compression. If left untreated too long, spinal cord compression can kill neurons in the central nervous system and result in permanent loss of function in the arms, hands, legs, and feet.

Often people ignore the symptoms of spinal cord compression or are not aware they have it until more troubling symptoms occur. If you have any of these symptoms — even if mild — let your doctor know:

- > Tingling or numbness in the arms, fingers, or hands
- > Weakness in the muscles of the arms, shoulders, or hands
- > Imbalance, clumsiness, or other coordination problems
- > Loss of fine motor skills

3 CONSERVATIVE NECK PAIN TREATMENTS

Surgery is rarely the first line of treatment for non-emergency neck pain. You should try non-surgical treatments first:

- > Over-the-counter pain relievers such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatories (Motrin, Aleve)
- > Acupuncture or massage
- > Physical therapy



PAIN MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES

If you've tried conservative therapies and still have pain, there are a variety of pain management procedures that could help.

These nonsurgical or minimally invasive procedures can effectively treat many types of chronic pain:

- > **Spinal injections** use steroids to reduce inflammation in the spine and provide enough pain relief for patients to participate in physical therapy and make other lifestyle changes that are the underlying causes of the pain.
- > **Radiofrequency ablation** is a minimally invasive procedure that uses an electric current to heat up a small area of nerve tissue to stop it from transmitting pain signals to the brain.
- > **Spinal cord stimulation** is an implanted device that uses electricity to interrupt pain signals on their way to the brain.

To determine if a patient's pain can be helped by one of these procedures, Neurosurgery One pain management specialists use a diagnostic test called electromyography. This procedure helps detect nerve dysfunction, muscle dysfunction, or problems with nerve-to-muscle signal transmission.

For more information about these procedures, go to neurosurgeryone.com/specialty/pain-management/

5 WHEN TO CONSIDER NECK SURGERY

If conservative treatments are not relieving your pain, your physician may want to discuss surgery. Nearly 50% of spine surgeries today are done on an outpatient basis, meaning you'll be home the same day. **Spine surgery options—including many minimally invasive techniques—include:**

- > Artificial Disc Replacement
- > ACDF (anterior cervical discectomy and fusion)
- > Cervical decompression surgeries
 - transcorporeal microdecompression
 - laminectomy
 - laminotomy
 - laminoplasty
 - foraminotomy
 - facetectomy



Neurosurgery One's spine experts can help you find the treatment that will work best for your condition. To make an appointment at any of our locations, call 720-638-7500.



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