

# Neck Pain - Muscle Strain

## Definition

- Pain or discomfort in the back, side or front of the neck
- Stiff neck (limited range of motion) is also common
- Includes minor muscle strain from neck overuse

## Health Information

### Causes

- In teens, new neck pain is mostly from strained neck muscles (muscle overuse).
- The most common modern cause is working with the head down in a flexed position. Such head tilting occurs with texting or looking at smart devices.
- Other triggers are sleeping in an awkward position or fixing something on the ceiling. Reading in bed or working on a computer for hours can also be causes.
- At all ages, it can be from a swollen lymph node. That can cause spasm of the neck muscle it lies against.
- Pain in the front of the neck often is from a sore throat. It can also be from a swollen lymph node.

### Symptoms of Strained Neck Muscles

- The head is often cocked to one side
- Can't bend the head backward or put the chin to each shoulder. Usually bending it forward is not limited.
- The neck muscles are often sore to the touch

### Pain Scale

- **Mild:** Your child feels pain and tells you about it. But, the pain does not keep your child from any normal activities. School, play and sleep are not changed.
- **Moderate:** The pain keeps your child from doing some normal activities. It may wake him or her up from sleep.
- **Severe:** The pain is very bad. It keeps your child from doing all normal activities.

## Care Advice

### 1. Overview:

- Most new neck pain is from stretching and turning the neck muscles too much.
- This causes strained muscles (also called muscle overuse).
- Long periods of looking down is the most common cause of unexplained neck pain in back. Seen mainly with texting or using other mobile devices.
- Looking up or to the side for too long is also a common trigger.
- Here is some care advice that should help.

### 2. Pain Medicine:

- To help with the pain, give acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or ibuprofen. Use as needed.

3. **Cold Pack:**
  - During the first 2 days, use a cold pack. You can also use ice wrapped in a wet cloth.
  - Put it on the sore muscles for 20 minutes.
  - Repeat 4 times on the first day, then as needed.
  - Reason: Reduces pain and any spasm.
  - Caution: Avoid frostbite.
4. **Heat Pack:**
  - If pain lasts over 2 days, put heat on the sore muscles.
  - Use a heat pack, heating pad or warm wet washcloth.
  - Do this for 10 minutes, then as needed.
  - Caution: Avoid burns.
5. **Sleep:**
  - Sleep on the back or side, not the stomach. Sleeping face down puts the most stress on the neck muscles.
  - Sleeping with a neck collar helps some people.
  - Use a foam neck collar (from a drug store). If don't have one, wrap a small towel around the neck.
  - Reason: Keep the head from moving too much during sleep.
  - Do this for a few nights.
6. **Stretching Exercises:**
  - Protect the neck for 48 hours.
  - Then start a gentle stretching program.
  - Improve the tone of the neck muscles. Do 2 or 3 minutes per day of gentle neck stretches.
  - Touch the chin to each shoulder. Hold for 10 seconds.
  - Touch the ear to each shoulder. Hold for 10 seconds.
  - Move the head forward and backward.
  - Don't apply any resistance during these stretching exercises.
7. **Prevention of Strained Neck Muscles:**
  - Avoid triggers that overstress the neck muscles. Common triggers are listed below:
  - Keeping the neck turned or bent for a long period of time. The most common cause is bending forward to text or look at a mobile device. Another example is painting a ceiling.
  - The neck likes to keep the head in a neutral position because it is heavy (12 pounds or 5.4 kg).
  - Carrying heavy objects on the head
  - Carrying heavy objects with one arm (instead of both arms)
  - Standing on the head
8. **What to Expect:**
  - New neck pain without a reason most often goes away in a few days.
  - Neck pain from muscle overuse (strained neck muscles) goes away in 1 to 2 weeks.

## Call Your Doctor If

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- Neck pain becomes severe
- Pain starts to shoot into the arms, upper back or legs
- Unexplained neck pain persists over 3 days
- Pain lasts more than 2 weeks
- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child becomes worse

### **Pediatric Care Advice**

**Author:** Barton Schmitt MD, FAAP

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