

Neck pain

Most neck pain only lasts a few weeks. There are things you can do yourself to ease it, but contact your GP if it does not go away.

Causes of neck pain

The most common causes of neck pain are:

- the neck becoming locked in an awkward position while sleeping
- bad posture – for example, when sitting at a desk for a long time
- a pinched nerve
- an injury – for example, whiplash from a traffic accident or fall

How you can ease neck pain

Do

- ✓ take paracetamol or ibuprofen – or use ibuprofen gel on your neck
- ✓ use a low, firm pillow
- ✓ put heat or cold packs on your neck
- ✓ try neck exercises

Don't

- ✗ do not wear a neck collar unless your GP tells you to - generally it's better to keep your neck moving
- ✗ do not do anything that could be dangerous if you cannot move your neck – for example, driving or cycling

Putting heat or cold packs on your neck

Try either of these:

- a pack of frozen peas wrapped in a tea towel for 5 minutes, 3 times a day
- a hot water bottle wrapped in a tea towel for 20 minutes, 2 to 3 times a day

You can also buy heat or cold packs from a pharmacy.

When to contact your GP

Talk to your GP if:

- pain or stiffness does not go away after a few weeks
- painkillers like paracetamol or ibuprofen have not worked
- you're worried about the pain
- you have other symptoms, like [pins and needles](#) or a cold arm – this could be something more serious

Preventing neck pain

Do

- ✓ make sure your head is the same height as the rest of your body when sleeping
- ✓ have a firm mattress
- ✓ sit upright – roll your shoulders back gently and bring your neck back

Don't

- ✗ do not keep your neck in the same position for a long time – for example, when sitting at a desk
- ✗ do not sleep on your front
- ✗ do not twist your neck when you're in bed

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