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# Cervical spondylosis

Cervical spondylosis is a common condition that can cause neck and shoulder pain, often in people over 40. A GP should check more serious cases affecting the spine.

## Symptoms of cervical spondylosis

Symptoms of cervical spondylosis include:

- neck and shoulder pain or stiffness that can come and go
- headaches that often start at the back of the neck

Cervical spondylosis is a normal part of ageing and many people do not have any symptoms.

## How to ease cervical spondylosis symptoms

There are things you can do to help ease neck pain caused by cervical spondylosis.

### Do

- ✓ try gentle neck exercises
- ✓ improve your posture
- ✓ take painkillers, like paracetamol (Link: [www.nhs.uk/medicines/paracetamol-for-adults/](http://www.nhs.uk/medicines/paracetamol-for-adults/)) and ibuprofen (Link: [www.nhs.uk/medicines/ibuprofen-for-adults/](http://www.nhs.uk/medicines/ibuprofen-for-adults/)), to ease any pain and stiffness

## A pharmacist can help with cervical spondylosis

A pharmacist may be able to recommend stronger painkillers if you need them.

➔ Find a pharmacy (Link: <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/pharmacy/find-a-pharmacy>)

### Neck exercises

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy: neck pain exercises (Link: <https://www.csp.org.uk/publications/neck-pain-exercises>)

### Ask for an urgent GP appointment or get help from NHS 111 if you have:

- pain that's getting much worse
- heaviness or weakness in your arms or legs
- pins and needles in an arm, as well as pain in your neck or arm
- neck pain that is worse when you move
- pain between your shoulder blades
- a stiff neck
- poor balance

You can call 111 or get help from 111 online (Link: <https://111.nhs.uk/triage/check-your-symptoms>)

## Call 999 if you have any of these:

- new problems walking
- loss of bladder or bowel control
- sudden lack of co-ordination – for example, with tasks like buttoning a shirt
- somebody's face droops on 1 side (the mouth or eye may have drooped)
- a person cannot lift up both arms and keep them there
- a person has difficulty speaking (speech may be slurred or garbled)

These can be signs of a medical emergency.

## What happens at your GP appointment

The GP will examine your neck and shoulder if they think you may have cervical spondylosis.

They may also test your reflexes and watch you walk.

Depending on your symptoms you may be sent for other tests such as X-rays or scans.

## Treatment for cervical spondylosis

Treatment for cervical spondylosis depends on how bad your symptoms are.

The GP may give you more exercises to do and recommend you carry out your usual activities as much as possible.

The GP may also prescribe a muscle relaxant or other medicine if the pain has been coming and going for a long time (chronic pain).

It usually takes a few weeks for treatment to work, although the pain and stiffness can come back.

Surgery is only considered if:

- a nerve is being pinched by a slipped disc (Link: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/slipped-disc/>) or bone (cervical radiculopathy)
- there's a problem with your spinal cord (cervical myelopathy)

Surgery is not always a cure but it may stop your symptoms getting worse.

## Physiotherapy for cervical spondylosis

If your symptoms do not improve in a few weeks the GP may recommend physiotherapy.

Waiting times for physiotherapy on the NHS can be long.

You can also get physiotherapy privately.

Find a registered physiotherapist on the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy website (Link: <http://www.csp.org.uk/your-health/find-physio/physio2u>)

## Self-refer for treatment

If you have cervical spondylosis, you might be able to refer yourself directly to services for help with your condition without seeing a GP.

To find out if there are any services in your area:

- ask the reception staff at your GP surgery
- check your GP surgery's website
- contact your integrated care board (ICB) – find your local ICB (Link: [www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/find-your-local-integrated-care-board/](http://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/find-your-local-integrated-care-board/))
- search online for NHS treatment for cervical spondylosis near you

## Causes of cervical spondylosis

Many people over 40 get cervical spondylosis as part of getting older.

It happens when ageing causes wear and tear to bones in the spine and the soft cushions of tissue (discs) in the neck.

You may also be more likely to get cervical spondylosis at any age if:

- you have previously had a neck injury
- you have a family history of the condition

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