

## Exercises for Neck Pain

### *Self-care at home*

*This handout gives exercises to help improve movement and lessen pain in your neck.*

### **What causes neck pain?**

Neck pain is a common problem. Neck muscles can be strained from poor posture, osteoarthritis, or more serious health issues.

### **How can exercise help?**

The exercises in this handout can help reduce pain and improve movement in your neck, shoulders, and trunk. These exercises retrain your muscles to help lessen stress on your neck.

### **What do I need to do?**

Work with your provider to create a **home exercise program** that includes doing the exercises in this handout. While doing your exercises, please note that:

- These exercises should **not** cause pain. If you have sharp pain when you do an exercise, stop doing it. Wait until the next day and try again.
- If you have more soreness or swelling a few hours after your exercises or the next morning, it may mean that you overdid it. If this happens, you can:
  - Do the exercise fewer times a day.
  - Do fewer repetitions (reps) of the exercise. For instance, if it says to do the exercise 20 times, do just 10 reps instead and see how you feel.



*Poor posture while working at the computer can cause neck pain.*



*Sitting like this will increase your neck pain.*



*Sitting like this may help ease your neck pain.*

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## Exercises

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### Posture

A lot of back pain can be eased by changing the way you sit during the day. For best posture when sitting:

- Keep your low back in a neutral position. To do this, hold your belly button in and sit up straight.
- Keep your shoulder blades **gently** drawn down and back, as if you were trying to reach your buttocks on the opposite side.
- Hold your head up straight, in line with your shoulders. See “Good posture” in the bottom photo at left.

Your goal is to be in this position throughout the day, as your muscle strength improves.

If you cannot sit with good posture and do your work at your desk, move your computer screen, keyboard, or other devices to match your position. Do **not** change your good posture to do your work.

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### Scapular (Shoulder Blade) Squeeze

- Sit on a firm surface, such as a hard chair.
- Gently squeeze your shoulder blades down and back. This is the same motion you use for good posture, but squeezing and holding for a couple of seconds helps your muscles get stronger.
- While doing this, try to keep your head in the same position over your shoulders. Try not to arch your low back.



- Hold the squeeze 2 seconds, then release.
  - Repeat 3 sets of 10 reps. If you get tired before doing all the reps, stop.
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## Chest Stretch

- Stand in a corner where 2 walls meet. Place both forearms on the wall (see photo). You can also do this stretch using the frame of a doorway.
- Gently step forward into the wall or doorway until you feel a pull across the front of your shoulders and chest.
- Do **not** stick your neck out or arch your low back.
- Hold the stretch for 20 to 30 seconds, then release. Repeat 4 times.



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## Open Book Stretch

- Lie on your side on a table or the floor. Bend your legs so that your knees are in line with your hips. Place your arms straight in front of you, resting them together on the surface (see top photo at right).
- Slide your top hand back while rotating your top shoulder, then lift your top arm straight up and over to the floor or table on your other side (see bottom photo at right).
- If you cannot reach the surface with your arm, go as far as you can with no pain.
- Keep your knees together and your hips facing forward.
- You should feel the stretch in your mid back and upper arm.
- Return to start position.
- Repeat 3 sets of 10 reps. If you get tired before doing all the reps, stop.



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## Chin Tucks

- Lie on your back on a firm surface. Place a towel roll or pillow under the back of your head. Your neck should be relaxed.
- Gently tuck your chin straight backward as if you are making a double chin. Hold 5 seconds, then relax.
- Do not lift your head off the towel roll or pillow.
- Repeat 3 sets of 10 reps. If you get tired before doing all the reps, stop.



## Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

UW Medicine Sports Medicine Clinic: Call 206.598.DAWG (3294) and press 2 during clinic hours:

Monday-Thursday: 6:30 a.m. to 7 p.m.

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