



Cervical Spondylosis

What is it?

Cervical spondylosis is essentially age-related degeneration, “wear and tear” (osteoarthritis) of the neck. It is relatively common and tends to develop after the age of 30, and becomes more common with increasing age.

To an extent, we all develop a degree of degeneration in the joints, ligaments and discs of the neck as we become older. Cervical spondylosis is commonly used to describe age-related degeneration but sometimes is used if the degree of degeneration is more severe, and causes more symptoms, than is expected for a given age.

Symptoms

Symptoms can vary from mild to severe and may include:

- Pain in the neck. This may spread to the base of the skull and shoulders. Movement of the neck may make the pain worse. The pain sometimes spreads down an arm to a hand or fingers. The pain tends to wax and wane with flare-ups from time to time. However, some people develop chronic (persistent) pain.
- Some neck stiffness, particularly after a night's rest.
- Headaches from time to time. The headaches often start at the back of the head just above the neck and travel over the top to the forehead.
- Numbness, pins and needles or weakness may occur in part of the arm or hand. Tell a doctor if these symptoms occur as they may indicate a problem with a 'trapped nerve'.

What should you do?

Exercise your neck, keep active and have good posture. Aim to keep your neck moving as normally as possible. As far as possible, continue with normal activities. In the past, some people have worn a neck collar for long periods when a flare-up of neck pain developed. It is now known that if you wear a collar for long periods it may cause the neck to 'stiffen up'. Therefore, try to keep your neck as active as possible.

- Painkillers are often helpful. You need only take them when symptoms flare-up and you should seek advice from your pharmacist or GP for advice in this regard.
- Anti-inflammatory painkillers (caution should be taken with these medications as they can cause abdominal side effects). As stated above any medication that you take should be discussed with your GP or pharmacist.
- A good posture may help. Try not to stoop when you sit at a desk. Sit upright.
- A firm supporting pillow seems to help some people when sleeping.
- The evidence that physical treatments help is not strong. What may be most helpful is the advice a physiotherapist can give on neck exercises to do at home.



Do I need an X-ray?

Your GP or physiotherapist will be able to advise you whether you will require an x-ray. X-rays are only an adjunct to diagnosing Cervical Spondylosis and are not always necessary in treating it appropriately.

Exercises:

- The following exercises have been provided as they may help your symptoms if done regularly.
- They are not appropriate for everyone and remember to commence these exercises at a manageable level.
- The recommended time, repetitions and frequency of each exercise are intended as a guide that you may need to modify.
- It is normal to experience some muscle fatigue and generalised muscle soreness when doing a new exercise but you should not experience severe pain or acute exacerbation of your symptoms whilst doing them and particularly not for a prolonged period of time after the exercises.
- If you are not managing consult your GP.

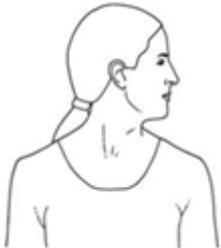
NB: If you experience dizziness, light-headedness or pins and needles stop doing these exercises.



If you can sit in front of a mirror the first few times you do this exercise.

Tilt your head to the side so that your ear moves closer to your shoulder (don't lift your shoulder!). You should feel a stretch on the other side of your neck. Repeat by tilting your head to the other shoulder. Hold 5 seconds.

Repeat 5 times each side, 2 - 3 times per day.



While sitting down, move your chin towards your shoulder rotating your head as far as you can slowly. Repeat to towards the other shoulder.

Repeat 5 times on each side, 2 - 3 times per day.



Tuck your chin in towards your chest. Look down as far as you can towards the floor. Feel the stretch in the back of your neck. Now look up slowly towards the ceiling as far as you can tolerate.

Repeat 5 times, 2 - 3 times per day.