**Cervical Spondylosis**

**What is cervical spondylosis?**

Cervical Spondylosis is a term used to describe age related changes to the vertebral bones and discs within our neck. It is a naturally occurring condition as we become older, this could be likened to having a grey hair or wrinkle.

**How is it caused?**

These changes are caused by normal aging of the spine. Following daily activity and over time, the discs gradually become thinner and bones can develop spurs which can cause pain and irritation. The joints within the neck can also become stiff, which results in a loss of range of movement in the neck.

**What are the symptoms?**

The symptoms of cervical spondylosis can come and go, or in some cases may be persistent. Symptoms include:

* Neck pain which can be provoked by movement
* Referred pain within the upper limbs, base of the skull, between the shoulder blades.
* Neck stiffness, especially on waking in the morning.
* Headaches and migraines

**How is it diagnosed?**

A diagnosis can be made based on your symptoms alone and/or including a physical examination from your Physiotherapist or GP.

Imaging is not normally needed to confirm a diagnosis of cervical spondylosis. An X-ray may be considered if your diagnosis is unclear or if you have failed to respond to recommended treatment. An XR may reveal a loss of height between the joints within the neck however these findings are very common and have not been shown to predict pain levels.

**What can I do?**

Exercise:

One of the most important things you can do to relieve your symptoms, is to keep moving your neck.

Try completing neck movements every few hours as this will enable you to get back to normal activity as soon as possible. Movement will help to reduce muscle tension, reduce pain and increase range of movement. Avoiding movement could lead to higher levels of pain and poorer recovery resulting in longer periods off work.

These exercises should be carried out often, throughout the day. These exercises may cause discomfort but should not increase your pain or symptoms. Perform the exercises in a slow and controlled manner.





Medication:

If you require medication to relieve your pain, you can liase with your GP or pharmacist to determine the most appropriate medication. It can be difficult to move your neck if you are in too much pain, therefore it is useful to take pain medication, to relieve the pain, enable you to carry out exercise effectively and allow a faster recovery.

Heat therapy:

The application of heat such as a hot water bottle wrapped in a towel or a wheat bag, to relax the muscles in your neck.

**How long will it last?**

The length of time symptoms are experienced will depend on the individual. Some individuals experience no pain with the condition, or pain could be episodic; lasting for a few weeks at a time, or pain could be more persistent. It is important to note that the spine is a very strong structure within the body and it is likely the pain will improve over time and following completion of exercises.

If your symptoms have not improved or worsen despite following the advice and exercise provided in this leaflet you will need to visit your GP surgery again.

**Other factors which may influence pain**

Look after yourself

Pain is not usually simply a physical problem. Your general well-being can make you vulnerable to pain and your wellbeing can also be made worse by pain. Looking after your general health and well-being will help recovery. There is helpful advice on this website: [https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou](https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/)

Reduce stress and anxiety

It is normal for people with pain to have stress, anxiety and change in mood. This may affect your ability to cope with the pain and may influence your pain levels. Help is available if you are being affected by stress, anxiety or low mood – see the links below or discuss with your practitioner.

It is important that your whole nervous system is in a healthy state to aid recovery. If your brain is stressed or overworked this may slow recovery. Relaxation is an important part of your recovery. Simple relaxation techniques may help manage pain and stress. Try to set aside some time each day to relax – you can use relaxation techniques as linked below, or simply an activity you enjoy – reading, deep breathing, sitting in the garden, singing – whatever relaxes you.

Find help and support here: <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>

<https://www.northessexiapt.nhs.uk/west-essex>

Physical Activity

Exercise improves fitness, confidence with movement and strength. It can also help reduce your stress and tension and improve your mood and quality of sleep, helping support you to return to normal activities. Perhaps you could simply start by trying to walk for 10 minutes per day.

Alcohol

Avoid alcohol in the early stages of healing (first three days). Evidence has shown this can slow down recovery and increase the chances of re-injury. <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/>

Sleep

Sleep is very important for your wellbeing. Poor sleep quality, and lack of sleep can make managing pain more difficult. Consistently getting 6-9 hours is recommended. Get help and tips here:

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/>

Nutrition and weight

Being overweight can increase the physical strain on the body and also contribute to inflammation in your body. Make sure you eat a balanced diet. Adult weight management services are available free to Essex residents here: <https://acelifestyle.org/weight-management>

Smoking

Smoking can also impact how quickly tissues can heal and affect pain levels. For help with stopping smoking <https://www.essexlifestyleservice.org.uk/stop-smoking/> <https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/>

**Is there anything I avoid?**

Do not wear a neck brace or collar as this will slow down your recovery.

**What other options are there?**

Physiotherapy:

Physiotherapists can provide expert guidance with exercise and other supportive treatments to help you return to normal activity.

If you require 1:1 physiotherapy treatment please fill out a self-referral form which can found at <https://eput.nhs.uk/our-services/essex/west-essex-community-health-services/adults/rehabilitation/musculo-skeletal-physiotherapy> and send to epunft.mskphysio@nhs.net

Surgery is not a recommended treatment for cervical spondylosis.

