

# Getting rid of neck pain: 6 ways to feel better

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The phrase "pain in the neck" is a tongue-in-cheek way to describe annoying situations or people that test our patience, but for those who experience genuine neck pain, it's no laughing matter.

Neck pain can be a debilitating condition that affects daily life and leaves sufferers longing for relief. This article will explore some practical strategies to alleviate neck pain and provide self-care tips, neck pain exercises and other helpful treatments to try.

## Neck pain causes

Neck pain, also called cervicalgia, is the discomfort experienced in or around the spinal area beneath the head. The [Cleveland Clinic](#) says neck pain is common, affecting 10% to 20% of adults.

And it should come as no surprise that your neck, medically known as the cervical spine, plays a crucial role in supporting the weight of your head and facilitating its movements. But various injuries and [medical conditions](#) can give rise to neck pain. Left untreated, neck pain can become a persistent hindrance, interfering with your daily activities and diminishing your overall quality of life.

In an article, [Dr. Zacharia Isaac](#), medical director of the Comprehensive Spine Care Center at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston and director of interventional physical medicine and rehabilitation at Harvard Medical School, writes that neck pain usually builds over time.

"Neck pain rarely starts overnight," he writes in a [school web page](#). "It usually evolves over time. And it may be spurred by arthritis or degenerative disk disease, and accentuated by poor posture, declining [muscle strength](#), stress, and even a [lack of sleep](#)."

Fortunately, most neck pain causes are not severe and can be effectively addressed through conservative treatments. The [Mayo Clinic](#) provides this list of common neck pain causes:

- Muscle strain—Activities like prolonged computer or

[smartphone use](#) and seemingly minor actions such as reading in bed can strain the neck muscles due to overuse.

- Worn joints—Like other joints, the neck joints can experience wear and tear over time. This can lead to the development of bone spurs, affecting joint motion and triggering pain.
- Nerve compression—Chronic neck pain can be attributed to the compression of nerves caused by bone spurs or herniated disks within the vertebrae of the neck. As these structures exert pressure on the nerves branching out from the [spinal cord](#), it can lead to persistent discomfort.
- Injuries—Rear-end auto collisions often cause whiplash injuries, where the head is forcefully jerked backward and forward, straining the neck's soft tissues.
- Diseases—Certain medical conditions, such as meningitis, rheumatoid arthritis or cancer, can potentially have neck pain as a symptom.

[Johns Hopkins Medicine](#) notes that pain that may come on quickly or slowly and that lingers for weeks, three months or more is considered chronic. Chronic neck pain is less common than acute pain.

## Neck pain symptoms

Recognizing and understanding the symptoms associated with neck pain is essential for effective diagnosis and treatment. By being aware of these telltale signs, you can gain insights into the nature of your discomfort and take appropriate measures to alleviate it.

The [American Association of Neurological Surgeons](#) says that in addition to neck pain, pressure on a nerve root or the spinal cord by a herniated disk or a bone spur may result in the following neck pain symptoms:

- Pain in the arm
- Numbness or weakness in the arm or forearm
- Tingling in the fingers or hand
- Difficulty with balance and walking
- Weakness in the arms or legs

Neck pain on the left side commonly stems from non-serious factors like muscle strain due to an uncomfortable sleeping position or inflammation. Occasionally, there may be serious underlying causes such as tumors or arthritis.

Similarly, pain on the right side of the neck is typically attributed to causes like muscle strain, poor sleeping posture or improper alignment. If the pain persists for an extended period, it is advisable to consult a doctor for guidance on medical treatments and potential home remedies.

Overall, neck pain is not something to ignore. [Keck Medicine of USC](#) says headache, a fever and a stiff neck may be signs of meningitis.

## How to get rid of neck pain

Harvard Health offers these [six strategies for neck pain relief](#):

1. Avoid prolonged static positions: To prevent your neck from getting stuck in an unhealthy position, it's important to avoid staying in one posture for too long. Regularly moving and changing positions can help alleviate strain.
2. Optimize your workspace ergonomics: Adjust your computer monitor to eye level, use hands-free options for phone calls and consider wearing a headset. When using a tablet, prop it on a pillow at a 45-degree angle instead of keeping it flat on your lap.
3. Keep your eyeglasses updated: "When your eyewear prescription

is not up to date, you tend to lean your head back to see better," Isaac said.

4. **Limit pillows while sleeping:** Sleeping with excessive pillows under your head can limit your neck's range of motion. It is advisable to use a supportive pillow that promotes proper spinal alignment.
5. **Respect your physical limits:** Before attempting any strenuous activities that may strain your neck and back, such as moving heavy furniture, consider the potential impact and seek assistance if needed.
6. **Make quality sleep a priority:** Sleep disturbances have been associated with an increased risk of various conditions, including musculoskeletal pain. Establishing healthy sleep habits can contribute to overall well-being, including neck pain management.

Exercises can also help you manage neck pain. Scotland's [NHS Inform](#) recommends movement and stretching exercises. Performing neck stretches involves simple and controlled movements. One option for a movement exercise is to start by facing forward and gradually turn your head to one side until you feel a gentle stretch on the opposite side of your neck. Hold for two seconds, then return to the starting position before repeating the stretch on the other side.

The Mayo Clinic also recommends pain relievers for acute [neck pain](#) relief. [Pain relievers](#) might include nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin IB, others) or naproxen sodium (Aleve) or acetaminophen (Tylenol, others). Be sure to follow all dosage recommendations and take only as directed.

## **Neck pain relief is possible**

Neck muscle pain can be a disruptive force, affecting [daily activities](#) and

overall well-being. Understanding the causes, symptoms and effective treatments makes it possible to seek relief. Whether through self-care practices, targeted exercises or medical interventions, the path to a [pain](#)-free [neck](#) is within reach.

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