

## Neck Strengthening Exercises

Many people with neck pain also have weak muscles in the neck, upper back and core. By strengthening and stretching those muscles your ability to function in your daily activities will also improve. Stronger muscles provide greater stability to the neck and trunk to help establish and maintain good posture and enhance all body movements. Increasing strength helps protect you from future problems. Continue exercises as long as your symptoms do not return, get worse, or move away from the centre of the back.

These simple exercises can help strengthen the muscles in your neck and upper back:

### Isometric strengthening:

1. Sit in a chair with your back supported and your head in the neutral position. Place your hand across your forehead. Push your head and neck forward as hard as you are able while firmly resisting any movement of your head with your hand (see isometric neck flexion). Push for 10 seconds, then relax, and repeat three times.



Isometric neck flexion

2. Similarly, place your hand against the back of your head as you try to push your head backward (see isometric neck flexion picture) against the resistance of your hand. Push as hard as you are able for 10 seconds, relax, and repeat three times.

3. Do the same by bending your neck to either side, again pushing as hard as you can against the resistance of your hand that is placed against the side of your head (see isometric side bend picture). Push for 10 seconds, relax, and repeat three times.

Perform one set of each of these exercises twice a day. As you repeat them over time, you can vary the position of your head and neck as your hand resists your movement, bending slightly forward, backward, or to each side. These exercises will increase your neck strength in all directions of motion.



Isometric neck extension



Isometric neck side bend

## **Supine Head Lifts:**

Lying on your back on a firm surface, raise your head fully off the surface, taking your chin to your chest, and hold for 5 seconds before returning to your starting position. Repeat that lift 8-10 times, twice a day.



Head lift: Neck curl

## 4 Point kneeling:

Assume a safe 4 point kneeling position and carefully look up toward the ceiling as much as possible. Hold this for 5 to 10 seconds, then slowly bend your neck with the chin nodding action. Continue with the neck bending motion as far as you can go comfortably, trying to touch your chin to your chest. Keep holding the relaxed low back and shoulder blade position detailed above. Do 5 to 10 repetitions.



Neck extension on hands and knees

## Scapular Squeeze:

Stand with your arms at your sides. Keep your head and neck in neutral position. With chest lifted, gently but firmly pull both shoulders backward while squeezing both shoulder blades backward and downward. Hold for 10 seconds and work up to 30 seconds. Perform one set of 5 repetitions, twice a day. You may add some resistance by pulling on an elastic band (attached to a door handle) while you pull your shoulders backwards.



Scapular squeeze

## **Neck Rotation:**

While sitting or standing with your head and neck in neutral position, slowly turn your head to the left as far as you comfortably can and hold for five seconds. Similarly, slowly turn the head to the right and hold for 5 seconds. Perform one set of 5 repetitions each direction, twice a day.



Active neck rotation

Other related exercises include the Y's, W's and T's found on our exercises tab on our website.

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