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"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"

What is Neck Pain?

Neck pain is pain that occurs anywhere from the bottom of your head to the top of your shoulders. It may spread to the upper back or arms and may cause limited neck and head movement. Neck pain is a common problem, especially in older adults. About 50% of people older than 50 have neck pain at some time. In my office, I also see it commonly in younger adults aged 20 to 45. It can even occur in young children.

Most neck pain is caused by activities that result in repeated or prolonged movements of the neck's muscles, ligaments, tendons, bones, or joints. This can result in a strain (an overstretched or overused muscle), a sprain (injury to a ligament), a spasm of the neck muscles, or inflammation of the neck joints. For example, painting a ceiling, sleeping with your neck twisted, slouching, or staying in one position for a long period of time—any of these things can cause neck pain. Less frequently, neck pain is caused by injury, such as a fall or whiplash that occurs in a motor vehicle accident.

In regards to the symptoms of neck pain, you may feel a "kink," stiffness, or severe pain in your neck. The pain may spread to your shoulders, upper back, or arms, and it may cause a headache. You may not be able to move or turn your head and neck normally. If there is pressure or irritation on a nerve as it exits between the vertebrae of the neck, you may have pain that shoots down the arm. You may also have numbness, tingling, or weakness in your arm. If your neck pain is long-lasting (chronic), it may be difficult to cope with daily life. Common side effects of chronic pain include anxiety and an inability to sleep resulting in fatigue and anxiety.

Neck pain is usually diagnosed through a chiropractic history (asking a series of specific questions) and physical examination of the neck. Your health professional will ask about your symptoms, injuries or illnesses, any previous treatment, and habits and activities that may be causing your neck pain. During the physical examination, your health professional will check your neck's range of motion and look for areas of tenderness and any nerve-related changes, such as numbness, tingling, or weakness in the arms or hands. If your pain starts after an injury, such as a severe fall or blow to the head, or if your pain does not improve after a few weeks, your chiropractor may want to refer you to have an x-ray or even more sensitive and specific tests (such as an CAT scan or MRI).

You can treat neck pain that has occurred suddenly and recently (acute pain) by:

- Reducing the pain with ice.
- Improving neck movement and flexibility with chiropractic treatment.
- Specific stretches and exercises recommended by your chiropractor.
- Avoiding further neck injury by changing activities and body mechanics, such as how you sit or sleep.

Most neck pain caused by activities, rather than traumatic accidents, goes away within 4 to 6 weeks. With chiropractic treatment, this time frame can be dramatically reduced. If you have neck pain and are wondering if chiropractic treatment can help you, please do not hesitate to call our office.