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

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## Neck Pain

Neck pain is an all too common problem that I see in my office many times a day. It can result in an inability to play your favourite sport and perhaps even prevent you from going to work.

What is neck pain? Pain in the neck can be due to a traumatic injury, a joint or muscle problem, a pinched nerve, or from arthritis in the joints of the neck. It can range from very mild discomfort to severe, sharp or burning pain. If the pain is "acute", then it came on suddenly and sometimes for no apparent reason. If the pain has lasted more than three months, it is termed "chronic" neck pain. Unfortunately, neck pain is a very common condition and is more frequently seen in women than men. Similar to back pain, most people will experience pain in the neck at some point in their life.

What causes neck pain? Many things can trigger neck pain. These include: trauma or injury (such as a motor vehicle accident), worry and stress, falling asleep in an awkward position with an already mildly tight neck, and maintaining improper head positioning while reading or using a computer keyboard.

There are several theories about why so many people suffer from neck pain. For most people, no specific reason for the pain can be found. However, most of the people I see in my office for neck pain likely had some very mild signs of problems "brewing" in their neck just prior to the real pain starting. This made their neck vulnerable to becoming acutely painful with even simple movements or activities.

What does neck pain feel like? Typically, there is general pain located in the neck area as well as stiffness in the neck muscles. The pain may radiate down to the shoulder or between the shoulder blades. It may also radiate out into the arm, the hand, or up into the head, causing a one-sided or double-sided headache. As well, the muscles in the neck are tense, sore and feel hard to the touch. Often, acute pain can give rise to abnormal neck posture in which the head is forced to turn to one side; this condition is known as torticollis. Sometimes, there is pain at the base of the skull and it may be accompanied by a feeling of weakness in the shoulders and arms. If the nerves exiting the neck are involved, there may be a prickly or tingling sensation in the arms and fingers.

How can chiropractic help? First of all, chiropractors are highly trained to identify exactly what is causing your neck pain. Once this is done, treatment can commence. This usually involves releasing the tension in the spastic muscles and restoring the proper mobility to the injured or affected joints. Only then can your body heal itself properly and completely. If you treat the pain and inflammation alone, without restoring the proper functioning of the neck itself, the problem is likely to arise again in the near future. If you are in an occupation or activity that you know requires prolonged physical stress on the neck or improper head positioning, you should be proactive when it comes to neck pain. This can be done by seeing your chiropractor regularly to correct the small problems in the joints of your neck before they become painful. Finally, combine this proactive treatment with regular neck stretching and exercise.