

Neck Pain

Patient Information Leaflet

MSK Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Service



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www.leicspart.nhs.uk/msk-physiotherapy-resources-getting-started/

What causes neck pain?

Neck pain is very common. Up to 80% of adults will experience neck pain at some point in their life. Some people get it more often. Even though it can hurt a lot, **neck pain is usually not caused by anything serious.**

Some common causes of neck pain are:

- muscle pain – this could be a sporting injury, following a car accident or work activities
- age-related changes – also known as spondylosis.
- sudden changes in activity levels – doing much more than usual or being much less active can cause pain
- poor sleep, stress, feeling low or very tired can also make pain worse
- spending long periods of time in one position – our bodies like to move, so being still for a long time can trigger pain

Sometimes, neck pain starts without a clear reason. Most neck pain **improves within a few weeks.** Scans are **rarely needed** and usually do not change treatment.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can be different for everyone, but can include:

- pain or stiffness in the neck
- difficulty turning your head or looking up or down
- stiffness after long periods being still
- pain spreading into the shoulders, upper back or down the arms
- headaches that start from the neck

Pain can change from day to day. This is **not** a sign that you're doing damage.

Self-help

Most new neck pain will improve within **6-8 weeks**.

Following some of these useful tips should help:

- change your activity levels – we do **not** recommend complete rest but changing or slightly reducing your activity levels can help in the early stages
- keep moving – short walks and gentle movement can help reduce stiffness
- simple pain relief – ask a pharmacist or GP for advice first

- stay at work or return as soon as you can – your employer or GP can help with adjustments
- look after your sleep and stress levels – both can affect pain
- try gentle exercises – moving regularly and doing simple exercises can help
- use heat – a heat pack or hot water bottle can help reduce pain (don't put it straight on your skin)

Should I refer myself to physiotherapy?

You may benefit from physiotherapy if:

- your pain is not improving after a few weeks
- you are struggling to return to work or normal activities
- you keep getting episodes of neck pain
- you would like more advice on exercises and recovery

When should I seek urgent medical advice?

Neck pain is rarely serious, however you should **go to Accident & Emergency straight away** if you suddenly develop:

- weakness in your arms or legs

- problems with your walking or balance e.g. tripping over, struggling to pick your feet up, or your legs feeling heavy
- numbness affecting both arms or legs
- clumsiness in your hands e.g. dropping things or struggling with coordination or finer tasks like handling small objects or doing up buttons
- changes to bladder or bowel function e.g. going to the toilet more urgently, leaking before you reach the toilet, difficulty passing urine
- neck pain with any of the following:
 - dizziness
 - changes to your vision
 - disturbances to your speech
 - difficulty chewing or swallowing
 - fainting or blacking out
 - nausea or vomiting
 - severe headaches
 - numbness or tingling in your face
 - drooping to your eyelid

Contact your **GP or call 111 urgently** if you have:

- new, unexplained neck pain, accompanied by a history of any of the following
 - cancer

- HIV
- TB (Tuberculosis)
- inflammatory arthritis
- neck pain combined with any of the following
 - feeling unwell
 - a loss of appetite
 - fever
 - unexplained weight loss
 - night sweats

Remember

Most neck pain **improves with time, movement and the right advice**. Staying active and confident in your movement helps your recovery.

If you need help to understand this leaflet or would like it in a different language or format such as large print, Braille or audio, please ask a member of staff.



MSK Physiotherapy Service

Find out more about the MSK Physiotherapy Service and what we offer

www.leicspart.nhs.uk/service/musculoskeletal-msk-therapy-physiotherapy/



Further Resources

Access our other MSK Physiotherapy resources [www.leicspart.nhs.uk/msk-](http://www.leicspart.nhs.uk/msk-physiotherapy-resources-getting-started/)

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