

CARING FOR YOUR NECK

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Most people don't give a second thought to the many functions the body performs on a daily basis, until they get sick. For this reason, many people wait to see a chiropractor. There are five dangerous words that doctors hear all the time from their patients who delay coming in: "maybe it will go away." The problem is it never does, and then the patient is in worse shape when they come in to the office. What most people don't know is that the cervical spine (neck) is the most complicated articular system in the body. If you suffer an injury to the neck, the results of that injury can be widespread across the whole body.

Your neck should allow you to bend, twist, and turn freely without pain, stiffness, or discomfort. Neck pain or stiffness is the first symptom to show when someone's neck is out of alignment. This area of your spine moves over 600 times an hour, whether you are awake or asleep.

Neck pain is a common complaint and is responsible for lost productivity in the workplace and at home. Loss of sleep, fatigue, mood changes, and other problems commonly occur because of neck pain. When the spinal nerves that come from the neck become irritated or compressed, they can also cause pain into the shoulder, the arm, cause tingling or numbness, and contribute to carpal tunnel syndrome (which may cause weakness, numbness, or tingling in the hands). Neck injuries are the major underlying cause of chronic headaches, resulting over 18 million office visits to doctors every year in the U.S.

Common causes of neck problems are accidents such as falls, sports injuries, or whiplash injuries from auto accidents. Poor posture, weak muscles, stress, everyday wear and tear, joint problems, and degeneration also contribute to neck problems.

A chiropractor is the doctor for you if you are experiencing neck pain. A chiropractor is highly trained in chiropractic adjustment methods to treat neck pain. An adjustment reduces the irritation of the delicate nerves, reduces muscle spasm, and increases mobility and circulation so the body can heal itself.

What should you do to *keep* your neck and back healthy, after your injury is healed? Be sure you have proper posture and good sleeping position. You should sleep on your back with a supportive pillow under your neck to maintain the normal curve of the neck. When you're trying to fight spinal injuries, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. These tips may help you prevent a spinal problem before it starts.

Playing Sports:

- Take time to warm up slowly before the game. Increase your heart rate with calisthenics, flexibility exercises, or light running. When you start to break a sweat, your body is at the correct temperature to stretch tendons and muscles.

In The Home:

- When you wash dishes, don't stand with both feet flat on the floor. Instead, raise one foot higher than the other by placing it on a short step, and then redistribute some of your weight by leaning against the counter. Try this: open the cabinet beneath the sink, bend your knee, and put your foot on the lowest shelf.
- When you are resting or watching TV, don't use the arm of the sofa as a pillow. The angle is too sharp for your neck.

- When picking up a child, don't bend at the waist. Squat with your back straight, keep the child close to you, and use your legs and arms to lift.

In The Yard:

- When mowing the grass, push the mower straight ahead of you. Avoid twisting and turning motions. If you must lift, bend your knees and let your arms and legs do the work, not your back. Stand as erect as possible. Take frequent breaks to avoid muscle strain. Before gardening, exercise to warm up. Stretching is important in preventing injuries. Kneel instead of bending. Alternate your weight as much as possible to balance the muscles used. Then cool down when you're finished with exercises and a short walk.
- When raking leaves, stand in a scissor position, reversing your legs often. Bend at the knees if you need to pick up grass and leaves, not at the waist. Make small piles to decrease back strain. For mowing, use your weight to push the mower. Whenever possible, use tools that are ergonomically correct for the job.

Utilization of these tips can save you many unhappy visits to the doctor. Remember, prevention is the key to a healthy spine. However, if you are currently experiencing neck pain make an appointment with your chiropractor to determine what is causing it and how to get rid of it.