



Neck care advice

Therapy department

01935 475 122
yeovilhospital.nhs.uk



There are some simple things that you can try that will help you look after your neck and may reduce any pain or discomfort you might have.

Posture / positions

The spine is made up of three important curves:

Cervical curve

Thoracic curve

Lumbar curve



It is important to restore these curves regularly. Prolonged loss of these curves, for example during bending activities or slouching, will over stretch and weaken the supporting structures of the spine and will either produce or worsen your neck pain.

Exercise

Research has shown that returning to normal movement and activities as quickly as possible will help recovery. Specific exercises may also help and your physiotherapist will discuss these with you.

Ergonomics

It is important to consider the nature of your working environment and its effect on your pain and discomfort.

In order to identify the problem, it is necessary to look at your posture, workplace, work pattern and your lifestyle.

If your working day involves prolonged sitting or standing in the same position the following may give some relief:

- A specific programme of exercises given by your physiotherapist which can be done at regular intervals during the day.
- During your leisure time try and adopt different positions and movements to those performed at work.
- Take short work breaks in order to moved around, stretch and relax.

If you want more information about ergonomics and how to assess your own working environment you may find the following website helpful:

[hse.gov.uk/msd/dse/guidance.htm](https://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/dse/guidance.htm)



Poor posture



Correct posture

Posture advice

- Sit right at the back of the chair
- Maintain the curve in the lower back using a supportive roll
- Ideally, sit on a firm upright chair with a high back
- Avoid sitting on a low, soft chair or couch, as this will encourage you to lose the curve in your lower back.
- Ensure your feet can reach the floor when you are sitting back in the chair or use a foot rest
- Do not cross your legs

If you work in an office:

- Try to establish a good working position as shown opposite
- Avoid awkward or constrained postures
- Make use of office equipment, eg. document holders and telephones headsets
- Adapt the working environment to suit your needs. Adjust the height of office furniture and reposition computer screens and keyboards as necessary
- Regularly change your position and perform any exercises which you have been given.

Sitting activities

eg. reading, writing and sewing

- Adopt a good sitting position as outlined above
- Avoid prolonged neck bending or protruded head posture, for example using a laptop or iPad
- Change your position regularly, eg. by standing up and walking around or stretching over the back of your chair.

Driving

Adopt a good position as outlined and alter the position of your seat to ensure:

- you do not overstretch to reach the pedals
- maintenance of the curve in your lower back
- maintenance of your head in the upright position.



(Using a roll or a wedge cushion may help achieve the correct position.)

Sleeping

A common cause of neck pain is lying with your head and neck in an awkward position for a long time. In order to try and prevent this:

- Try and lie on your back or on your side with your neck supported so that the natural curve between your head and shoulder is maintained
- Avoid lying face down with your head turned to one side. This will strain the upper joints in your neck and the surrounding soft tissues.

Pillows

The main function of the pillow is to support both the head and neck and maintain the natural curve without tilting or lifting up the head. An adjustable pillow is preferable, eg. feathers, with rubber or foam chips as second choice. You may gain additional relief by adapting your pillow:

- Roll up a hand towel and place it along the edge of the pillow nearest your shoulders
- Make a butterfly pillow by tying a band around the middle part of your pillow so it forms a natural support around your neck

Pain relief

Poor posture can lead to increasing tension in the muscles around the neck which may cause headaches, muscle spasm and pain. It is important you keep the pain under control to allow the neck to move. Varying relief can be achieved by local heat application, such as:

- Hot water bottle wrapped in a towel
- A heated rolled towel placed around your neck to maintain your natural curve.

Collars

Collars are rarely used in most hospitals as research has not shown them to be of help.

For further information please visit:
[nhs.uk/Conditions/Neck-pain/Pages/Introduction.aspx](https://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Neck-pain/Pages/Introduction.aspx)

If you have any questions concerning this advice sheet, contact a senior physiotherapist on 01935 384 358.

If you need this leaflet in another format, eg. large print or a different language, please ask a member of staff.