

Neck Pain (Cervicalgia)

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What Is Neck Pain?

Neck pain, also called **cervicalgia**, is pain that comes from the neck and surrounding structures, including muscles, joints, ligaments, discs, and nerves. Neck pain is very common and may develop suddenly or gradually over time.

Common Symptoms

Symptoms may include:

- Pain in the neck, upper back, or shoulders
- Muscle tightness or stiffness
- Tenderness to touch
- Difficulty turning or moving the neck
- Headaches that start in the neck
- Aching, burning, throbbing, or sharp pain

What Causes Neck Pain?

- Muscle strain or poor posture
- Joint irritation or stiffness
- Whiplash and other injuries
- Disc bulges or herniations
- Arthritis and age-related wear and tear
- Pinched or irritated nerves

In rare cases, neck pain may be caused by more serious medical conditions that require additional medical evaluation.

How Is It Diagnosed?

Diagnosis begins with a review of your symptoms, medical history, and a physical examination. Your provider may evaluate:

- Neck movement and flexibility
- Muscle strength
- Reflexes and sensation
- Posture and body mechanics
- Signs of nerve irritation

X-rays, MRI, or CT scans may be recommended if there has been significant trauma, persistent symptoms, or signs of nerve involvement.

Treatment

Treatment depends on the cause of your symptoms and may include:

- Chiropractic adjustments and manual therapy
- Therapeutic exercises and stretching
- Soft tissue therapy
- Postural and ergonomic education
- Home exercise programs
- Heat, ice, or electrical stimulation when appropriate

Patients with nerve irritation may also benefit from traction, nerve mobilization exercises, and targeted rehabilitation programs.

Prognosis

Most cases of neck pain improve with conservative treatment and active self-care. Recovery time depends on the cause of the condition, how long symptoms have been present, and the severity of the injury.

Typical Duration of Care

Treatment plans vary based on the diagnosis and individual response to care:

- Mild to moderate neck pain: 4–9 visits over 2–4 weeks
- Moderate to severe sprains or strains: 12–24 visits over 2–6 months
- Disc-related or nerve-related conditions: 12–24 visits over 3–6 months

When to Seek Immediate Medical Attention

Seek prompt medical care if you experience:

- Significant trauma to the neck
- Progressive weakness in an arm or hand
- Loss of balance or coordination
- Loss of bowel or bladder control
- Severe, unrelenting pain
- Fever, unexplained weight loss, or other signs of illness along with neck pain