

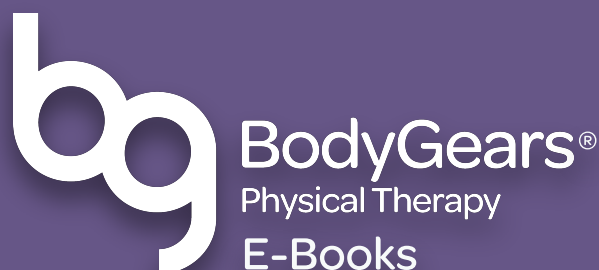
# Quick and Natural Neck Pain Relief

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The Tips You're Missing in Your  
Everyday Life

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Easy to Use Desktop  
or  
Mobile Versions



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# You Are Not Alone.

If you are struggling with neck pain, you are not alone. Millions of people struggle with neck pain on a daily basis and either don't know where to turn for help or feel like they've tried everything and nothing has worked.

Does this sound familiar: you are sitting at your desk typing on your computer. You finally finish your project only to realize you are hunched over your keyboard with your chin getting closer and closer to your screen. Your phone then vibrates and you take it out of your pocket to check. You lean back into your chair with your chest caved in and your head down, as you prepare to send a reply text. Now it's hard to concentrate and you need help!



THE MULTI-DEVICE



THE SMART LEAN



THE TRANCE



THE COCOON

Practicing physical therapy in the tech age means we see these types of cases everyday. The broad category of neck pain is one of the most common conditions that physical therapists treat. 'Text neck' has become an epidemic as people rely more and more heavily on their electronics for communication, work, and entertainment. See for yourself and look around at the people waiting for trains and traffic lights.

In an effort to help you even before you see us, we have compiled information on topics we commonly discuss with our neck pain clients. Learning about the cause of neck pain will help you to prevent episodes from re-occurring and learning specific strategies for travel, work, sleep and exercise will allow you to move more freely in your body.

# Getting to the Root of the Problem

There are a number of causes of neck pain and many overlap into a combination of factors. Here are four common sources of neck pain:

**Injuries:** Neck pain can be the direct result of trauma to the neck sustained in a car accident, a fall, or sports. A whiplash injury can result in joint, muscle, or ligament damage that leads to pain and range of motion limitations.

**Poor Posture:** The average adult head weighs about 10 lbs. If your neck is not well aligned, your muscles, joints, and ligaments will have to bear that weight to hold up your head instead of resting on your spinal column.

**Emotional Stress and Anxiety:** Your fight or flight response can play a huge role in your neck pain. Not only can it cause the muscles around your neck to tense, but it can exacerbate an old neck injury and cause you to adopt abnormal postures.

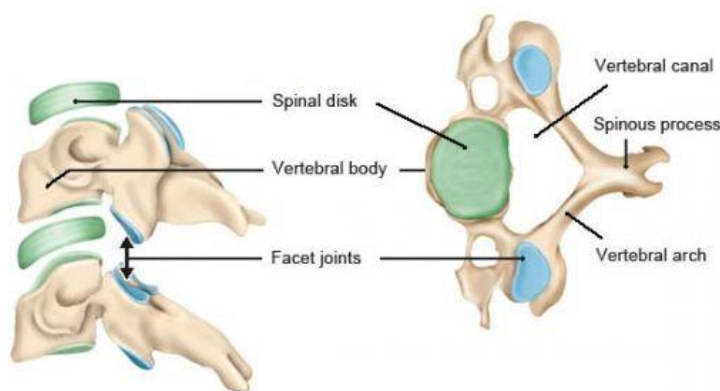
**Aging:** No one wants to hear it, but getting older means lowering your stress levels and moving with good posture are all the more important because "if you don't use it, you lose it." While structural changes can occur with age, some things are cosmetic changes while others can cause dysfunction.



# The Anatomy of Neck Pain

**Muscles:** The two major groups to know are the neck extensors and the deep neck flexors. When your head sits forward of its pedestal (the spinal column), and held there long enough, your neck extensors shorten and can feel like they're cramping. If they're held there long enough, they can feel tight and people will often try to massage them to fix the symptoms. However, the cure is deep neck flexor activation which will pull your chin back onto its pedestal, keeping all the surrounding muscles happier.

**Joints:** Each vertebra connects to the next vertebra at three points - at the disc and at two facet joints. The disc can become herniated or dehydrated, which may or may not lead to pain, while the facet joints can become restricted, leading to loss of range of motion and pain.



**Nerves:** Each vertebra has associated nerves that exit the spinal cord on the left and right. Nerves can become irritated at these exit points or anywhere along their path to your fingertips. Any symptoms such as radiating pain, numbness, or tingling indicate a nerve is being irritated.

The information in this E-Book is not intended to diagnose any medical conditions or replace your health care provider. If you experience any pain or difficulty with the exercises or tips in this E-Book, stop immediately & consult your physical therapist.

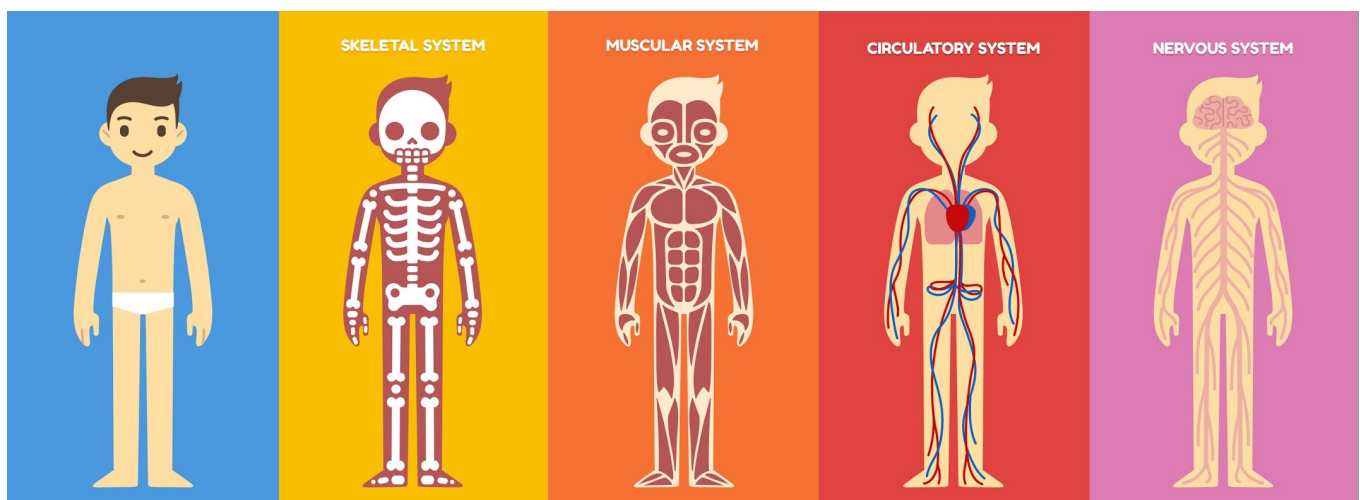
# The Anatomy of Neck Pain

**Ligaments:** These connect bone to bone and are usually only injured by trauma, such as a whiplash injury. Ligaments are your neck's passive support structures while your muscles are the active supports.

**Bones:** Fractures of the vertebrae generally occur in two places - the body and the vertebral arch.

Spondylosis	Umbrella term for degenerative changes
Spondylitis	Inflammatory disease
Spondylolysis	Vertebral arch fracture
Spondylolisthesis	Vertebral arch fracture with displacement

**Blood Vessels:** If blood flow to the brain is disrupted, it can result in headaches, dizziness, blurred vision, and neck pain.



# Travel Tips

Moving luggage and spending long periods of time in the same seated position can leave you rubbing your neck by the time you reach your destination. Below are some strategies for reducing and preventing neck pain while traveling.

## Carrying Bags/Luggage:

- Always carry heavy objects as close to your body as possible. Not only will it require less effort to carry that object, but your spine will be in a more stacked alignment to support the load.
- Avoid overloading your back with purses, satchels, backpacks, and children. Carrying heavy items asymmetrically on one shoulder is a common way to aggravate existing neck symptoms. Until you've learned to move more efficiently with the weight of a heavy backpack, save yourself the pain and stick to rolling luggage.
- Lift your luggage by bending at either your hips or knees but not your back. In order to maintain your gaze on the object you want to lift, you'll have to extend your neck if you bend forward at your back to pick it up.
- Avoid quick twisting movements when moving your bags or luggage. Providing your neck muscles with adequate time to stabilize will help you move pain free. Pivoting your whole body to move or look at something can save you unnecessary neck pain.





## **Sitting in the Car:**

- Use a lumbar support to fill in the curve of your back while resting your head against the headrest.
- Stay close enough to the steering wheel and brake that you don't feel the need to reach or lean forward (your elbows should be bent and nearly at your sides, resting on the armrest or the console).
- Take turns driving longer distances and remember to stop for rest breaks at least every hour where you actually stand up and move your spine in all different directions.

## **Sitting on the Plane:**

- Use those U-shaped neck pillows to avoid straining your muscles and joints with the weight of your head if you start to doze off.
- Use a lumbar support to fill the curve of your back (this could be a towel, small pillow, or sweater) and place one of your bags under your feet if your feet don't rest firmly on the ground.
- Take standing breaks to walk up and down the aisle as much as possible. Circulation is key to feeling good.
- A lot of neck exercises can be done in sitting so take advantage of this time to stretch, strengthen, and mobilize.

## **Summary of Important Travel Tips:**

- **Travel light and don't strain yourself if you could be using a rolling bag or cart instead.**
- **Take frequent breaks to actually stand up and move around.**
- **Support your lower back during prolonged sitting and your neck if you will be sleeping.**
- **Sitting on the front edge of your sit-bones will help your neck to settle into good alignment**



# Sleeping Tips

We spend a third of our lives sleeping because sleep not only gives us the energy we need to function throughout the day, but it's when our bodies repair themselves. Therefore, it is extremely important that we find ways to promote good sleep postures that keep us comfortable throughout the night, even when changing positions. Below are some strategies to help eliminate neck pain in various sleeping positions.

## Back Sleepers

Use a pillow that fills the space between your neck and the bed without bringing your chin closer to your chest. The pillow should always reach the tops of your shoulders but never be under your shoulders. It's better to end up with a pillow that's too thin than too thick and to use a small towel underneath your neck area. The end goal is to fall asleep with your neck in a midrange relaxed position.

## Side Sleepers

Use a thicker pillow to fill the space between your neck and the bed (which is a much larger gap than when sleeping on your back). You want your head to be a continuation of your spine and not be side-bending up or down.

## Stomach Sleepers

Avoid this position if you can as it places a lot of strain on your neck. If you can't sleep on your back, ask your physical therapist for other solutions.

For more sleep posture tips, check out our Sleep E-Book.  
email [social@bodygears.com](mailto:social@bodygears.com)

# Work Tips

One of the most common places to develop neck pain is in the workplace. Depending on your occupation, this could be due to your workstation or your job tasks. Speak to your physical therapist if there is a repetitive motion or a large amount of heavy labor that you are required to do at work. Below are some strategies for setting up your workstation to prevent neck pain.

## Setting Up Your Workstation

- **Head** - Ears over shoulders, shoulders over hips.
- **Eyes** - When gazing straight ahead, you should be looking at the top third of your computer screen, positioned an arm's-length away.
- **Neck** - Never cradle a phone between your ear and shoulder. Always use the loudspeaker or a headset if you require the use of your hands.
- **Shoulders** - You should be able to feel the middle part of your shoulder blades against the back of your chair.
- **Elbows** - Hanging by your sides a tennis ball-width away from your torso. Your elbows should be slightly higher than your wrists (achieved by raising the height of the chair).
- **Wrists** - There should be a straight line from your forearms to your hands when resting on the keyboard. Avoid using a windshield wiper motion with the mouse, instead move from your shoulder and elbow.
- **Lumbar Spine** - The curve of the chair should fill the curve of your back. Adjust the height of the backrest if possible for your comfort.

## Stand up at least every 30 minutes.

If you have a standing desk, the point is to have the ability to alternate your work posture. You don't want to replace static sitting with static standing all day. Sitting is not bad for you, it's staying in any one static posture for longer than 30 minutes that decreases circulation.

# Exercise Tips

Many physical activities involve the use of your arms and thereby your neck - yoga, Pilates, weight lifting, volleyball, dance - and provide you the opportunity to coordinate skilled movement. A physical therapist can work with you to develop the stability and mobility you need for your specific activity of choice. Below are some general strategies you can employ on your own while exercising to attempt to prevent or minimize neck pain.

## Before Exercise

- Do a general cardio warm-up, like a 5-10 minute jog, getting your blood flowing and physically warming-up your muscles to help them loosen
- Reactivate your system (if you were sitting for long periods earlier in the day, your core muscles might have turned off) - your physical therapist can give you specific exercises tailored to you but two good general ones are chin tucks and side planks



Resist pulling your chin forward off its pedestal via your thumb by activating your deep neck flexor muscles (hold 10 seconds x 10). Strengthen the sides of your neck by doing a side plank from your knees. Ensure your spine is straight and you're pushing through your elbow (hold 30 seconds).

The information in this E-Book is not intended to diagnose any medical conditions or replace your health care provider. If you experience any pain or difficulty with these exercises & tips, stop and consult your physical therapist.

# Exercise Tips

## During Exercise

- Ensure your chin isn't poking forward, pointing up towards the ceiling, or pressed down against your chest during any exercises to keep your neck relaxed. Try doing a mental check every 3 reps for resistance exercises or every 3 minutes for cardiovascular exercises.
- If you start to experience neck pain try going back to the chin tuck and side planks as well as resetting your shoulder blades over your ribcage before returning to that exercise. If your neck pain takes longer than 2 minutes to go away after stopping an exercise, report this exercise to your physical therapist.
- Avoid lifting heavier weights until you meet the 2-for-2 rule: you can perform 2 or more reps beyond your rep goal for that exercise on at least two consecutive workouts without any pain aggravation and with 100% certainty that you have efficient form without compensation.

## After Exercise

- Stretch. Muscles shorten to a functional length for whatever activity you perform. You want to allow them to lengthen again through full range.
- Ice - used for inflammatory pain relief. Ice will constrict blood flow to the area which will reduce swelling and inflammation but can also tighten muscles. Ice should be applied for 10-20 minutes max in an hour. The numbing effect of ice can also help with pain relief.
- Heat - used to relax tight muscles. Heat will increase blood flow to the area which will help muscles to relax but can also worsen inflammation. Heat should be applied for 10-20 minutes.

# Important Symptoms to Tell Your Physical Therapist About

- Difficulty moving your neck in any direction
- Pain in the center of your neck
- Tightness in the muscles of your neck
- Pain shooting down one shoulder, especially into your arm and hand
- Shoulder pain
- Headaches, blurred vision, and dizziness
- Feeling like your neck is 'unstable'
- Weakness in your shoulders, arms, or hands
- Numbness and tingling in your arms or hands
- Swelling, coldness, or color changes in your arms

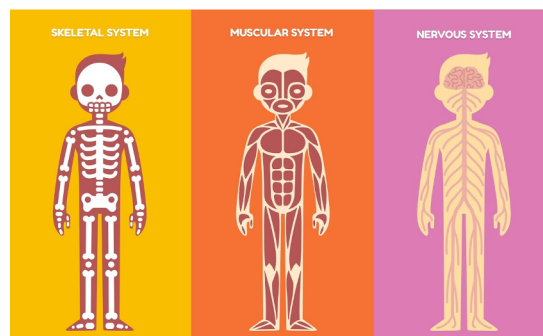


# Achieving Quick and Natural Neck Pain Relief with Physical Therapy

Physical therapy is effective when it addresses the 3 pillars of human movement. These are Mechanical Freedom, Neuromuscular Integration, and Motor Control. No other type of health care practitioner addresses all three of these components and nor do all physical therapists.

To achieve successful and lasting neck pain relief, ensure your physical therapist will be addressing all three of these components. At Body Gears, we start by ensuring that your superficial and deep neck muscles, vertebral joints, nerves, and connective tissues are all free to move the way they were designed to move, with the ability to lengthen, shorten, and glide.

Next, your body needs re-training to actually use that regained freedom of movement, otherwise you'll just keep using the motor patterns you got in the habit of using while you were in pain. Neuromuscular integration refers to muscle initiation, strength, and endurance. All three components are necessary through the entire range of a joint's motion for normal human movement. Most neck pain sufferers either have poor endurance or don't even know how to turn on their deep neck flexor muscles.



# Achieve Quick & Natural Healing with Physical Therapy

Finally, once your joints are free to move and your muscles are activating through their full range of motion, you need to create actual movement! Efficient movement is created by coordinating the right muscles to fire at the right time and the right amount for two purposes; there should be a balance between muscles meant to **stabilize** and muscles meant to create **motion**.

Often what happens with neck pain is that the muscles meant to stabilize "shut off" and the muscles meant to create motion try to do the job of a stabilizer as well as a mover, which they are not built to do. Stabilizer muscles "shut off" when they are held in positions they can't function well in, such as driving with your chin poking forward.

Your physical therapist can walk you through efficient postures, muscle activation patterns, and movement mechanics for not just your neck but your thoracic spine and shoulders, too. Every activity you do, including driving, working, and sleeping, has its own unique set of demands and we can help you be successful and pain free with all of them.

To hear more about the Body Gears method, have your lingering questions answered, or speak to one of our physical therapists about getting your life back, schedule a Free Discovery Session!





# About Body Gears Physical Therapy

Body Gears exists to enhance human mechanics, movement and performance, promoting a healthier quality of life and elevating you to your optimum self. It's our vision to help you discover a better life by redefining Physical Therapy.

At Body Gears, you will find some of the country's top Functional Manual Therapists who love problem-solving challenging cases. We achieve excellent results through study and collaboration.

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## Call to Schedule Your Free Discovery Session Today

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### 6 Convenient Locations in Chicago and Surrounding Suburbs:

Chicago - West Loop (312) 728-3030

Chicago - Lincoln Park (312) 739-3030

Oak Brook (630) 912-6040

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