

6 QUICK FIXES FOR NECK AND SHOULDER PAIN

Proven methods
from a Doctor of
Movement to
improve pain
and return you
to everyday
function



COMMON CAUSES OF NECK PAIN

Neck and shoulder pain are some of the most common complaints I see from patients on a regular basis. Some of those individuals have been dealing with pain for most of their lives – others have just experienced symptoms only a few weeks ago.

Regardless of when this issue arose, there are techniques to improve these problems.

Statistics show that **two thirds** of the population will experience neck and shoulder pain at some point in their lives, and **ten percent** of these people will continue to experience symptoms chronically (years to decades).

There are many reasons someone may experience neck or shoulder pain.

Some reasons are structural causes such as degenerative conditions which include Osteoarthritis, disc degeneration, disc herniation, spinal stenosis, and Rotator Cuff injuries.

Other causative factors are functional such as poor posture, soft tissue restrictions, overuse injuries or poor movement habits.

The helpful hints listed below are to inform you of ways to help improve your pain, return you to normal-life activities, and promote the permanent relief you want and need. I hope my knowledge on this issue can be of great benefit to you.



Dr. Shane Smith, DPT

RELIEF IS IN SIGHT

1. ICE VS. HEAT

One of the most common questions I get asked is, "When do I use ice for an injury and when should I use heat?"

The answer to that question is related to what was the cause of injury. If the injury to the neck or shoulder was recent and has warmth, redness or swelling present, as well as a potential throbbing pain, the cause is most likely inflammatory, therefore ice is the better choice for the injured area.

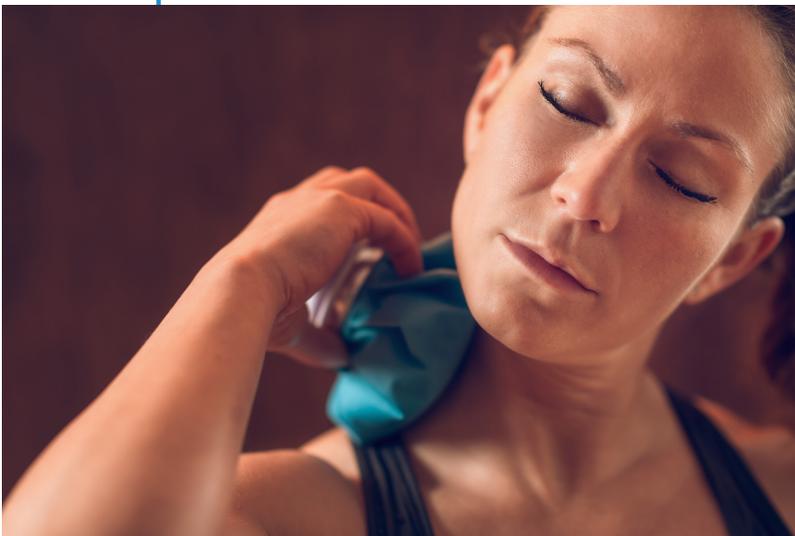
Ice will help an inflammatory condition by reducing the flow of fluid, which can cause swelling and cooling to the surrounding tissue around nerve endings that are responsible for signaling pain. The time for ice use should be limited to **10-15 minutes**. If ice is applied for too long (greater than 30 minutes) skin damage may occur.

Heat is best used for chronic conditions and those that are a result of joint or muscle stiffness.

This is usually someone who feels symptoms worse in the morning or after sitting at a desk for a prolonged period of time. Heat works by increasing circulation to an injured area which then increases tissue flexibility and range of motion.

Heat should be applied to the affected area for no longer than **30 minutes** and the temperature should be comfortable not hot.

If you are lying down on heat make sure to have a physical barrier between your skin and the heating element. If you have sensation deficits, do not lie on the heat due to the inability to feel if the heat is getting too hot for your skin.



THE GOAL IS TO BE PAIN-FREE

2. COMFORTABLE ACTIVE RANGE OF MOTION

The ability to restore comfortable range of motion in an injured area is always paramount for speedy recoveries.

When beginning with range of motion training, you must keep the motion in a tolerable pain range. It is KEY to not move into sharp pain otherwise you will continue to irritate the injured tissue.

Another negative to moving into areas of too much discomfort is it will cause your brain to become hypersensitive to the pain in that region of your body. Doing this will make you think and feel that pain constantly and prevent you from focusing on other things in your life.

When range of motion exercises are performed in a tolerable discomfort range, the joints and muscles can get reacclimatized to movement. Make sure the discomfort level does not cause muscle guarding or tensing with movement.

For neck pain, start lying down on your back with comfortable neck support (towel rolled up, or a small pillow) and begin with left and right rotation followed by gentle chin tucks. You can do a combination of the two movements, chin tucks with neck rotations, left and right in a tolerable pain range.



Shoulder movements should begin lying on your back with a light stick or golf club in both of your hands, or you can just hold your injured arm with your non-injured hand at the wrist to assist with overhead range of motion.

You will slowly bring both arms up and forward overhead in tolerable pain range, also work your arm out to the side keeping the arm resting on the floor or bed.

Finally position yourself on your side with your non-injured arm and place a small towel under your injured shoulder and begin with rotating your injured shoulder away from your body.

All range of motion exercises are displayed in table 1 on page 9.

GET BACK TO FEELING BETTER

3. STRETCHING

If neck and shoulder range of motion exercises are tolerable, you can begin with stretches to the muscles in this region.

The most common muscle that get tight and restrict normal motion in the neck are the upper trapezius muscle, the levator scapula muscle and the scalene muscles that attach from your neck and head down to your collar bone and shoulder blade.

Two very effective stretches for the neck are both performed sitting in a chair where the injured side's arm can hold the bottom of the seat to keep that shoulder down while the head is held with the non-injured side hand at the back base of the skull and gently pulled down and away from the injured side of the neck.

The second stretch is held with the non-injured arm's hand near the side of the injured side and gently pulled out to the side (ear to shoulder) away from the injured side.

The shoulder muscles that are most affected are the pectoralis muscles which are positioned on your ribs in the front of your body as well as your latissimus muscle that is on your back.

Both of these muscles attach to your arm right around the shoulder joint and when they are tight they will cause movement dysfunction that will lead to shoulder injuries.

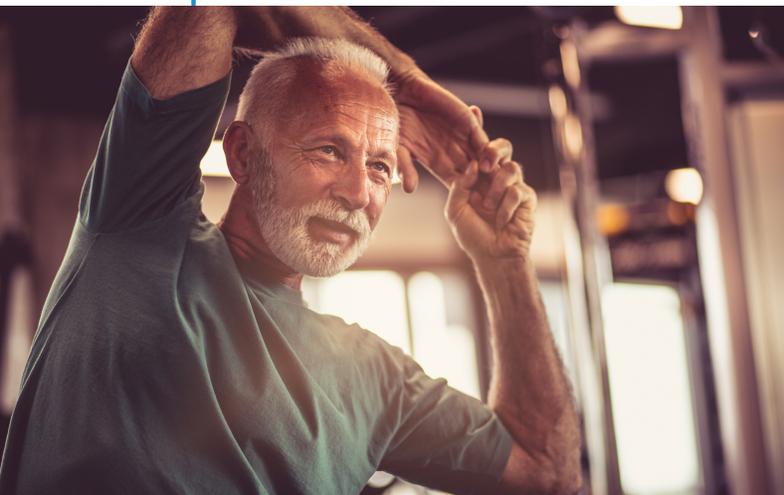
Pectoralis muscle stretching can be performed standing in a doorway with your arms at your side shoulder height with your elbows on either side of the doorway. Once in this position simply step through the doorframe to add stretch to the front of the shoulders.

An alternative position for this stretch can be performed lying on your back in bed with the injured arm near the side of the bed and simply stretch your arm out to the side until a comfortable stretch is felt across the chest.

For the Latissimus Dorsi muscle — standing or sitting — hold the injured wrist with the non-injured hand and bent the trunk and pull the injured arm overhead towards the non-injured side and slightly forward.

All shoulder and neck stretches should be performed 2-3 times a day for **30-45 seconds** each in a comfortable pain range.

No stretch should be performed to the point of severe pain or result in lingering pain. See Table 2 on page 9 for images of all the stretches described above.



4. SLEEP AND PILLOWS

It cannot be stressed enough how vital sleep is to injury recovery. A lot of tissue healing occurs when we sleep, therefore if you are not getting good sleep at night, it is recommended to take a short nap during the day if permissible.

Naps only need to be **20-45 minutes** to have positive health benefits. For adults, evening sleep should be between **6-8 hours**.

The pillow you sleep on is critical to achieving the correct amount of sleep to heal from an injury.

If your pillow is a few years old and seems to be losing some of its support, it may be time to get a new one – or if you are waking in the middle of the night with neck pain, the amount or type of support you are sleeping on might be the root cause of your problems.

The perfect pillow is different for each person's neck. Finding the perfect pillow should mean you maintain a neutral spine while you lie in your sleeping position.

The term neutral spine refers to your neck not bending left or right if you are a side sleeper or too far forward if you are a back sleeper.



Memory foam and dense foam pillows work for some people and others do better with a cotton or feather pillow that will support the neck while sleeping.

Making sure your neck is supported and held in a neutral position are the most important aspects of your pillow.

I recommend to avoid sleeping on your injured shoulder unless necessary or sleeping on your stomach with neck pain.

SLEEP IS VITAL TO INJURY RECOVERY

5. POSTURE

Posture corrections and supportive exercises are always a great idea for issues affecting the neck and shoulder region.

Many common shoulder and neck issues are fixed entirely from correcting posture and performing supportive exercises to maintain strength in your postural muscles.

If your neck or shoulder problems are worst in a prolonged position there is a very strong chance the prolonged positioning is the problem. There is good news to this problem that is it is easy to correct.

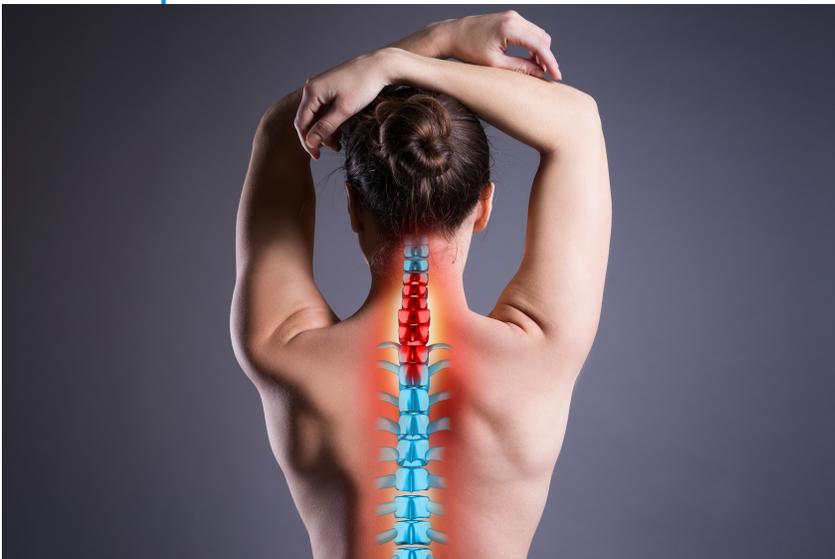
Shoulder blade squeezes are a great posture exercise to start with. I also recommend chin tucks and spinal lengthening movements.

The best way to describe spinal lengthening exercises are to think about a string attached to the top of your head and someone is putting tension on it, lengthening your spine as you sit or stand.

These three easy posture exercises can help correct poor posture and also start strengthening the muscles that have gotten weak and allowed your body to get in a position that has resulted in injury.

Table 3 below on page 9 will show you images of the exercises described.

Remember, it takes two thousand volitional attempts at something before it becomes habit, and once you have stored these as habitual, you will automatically continue to do them.



**IMPROVE YOUR
CURRENT STATE**

6. CONSULT A MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL

If some of the simple fixes given above are not getting you back entirely to where you want to be to live a pain-free life, then it may be best to speak to a medical professional to assist you on your road to recovery.

There are many medical professionals that can assist you along your rehabilitation path.

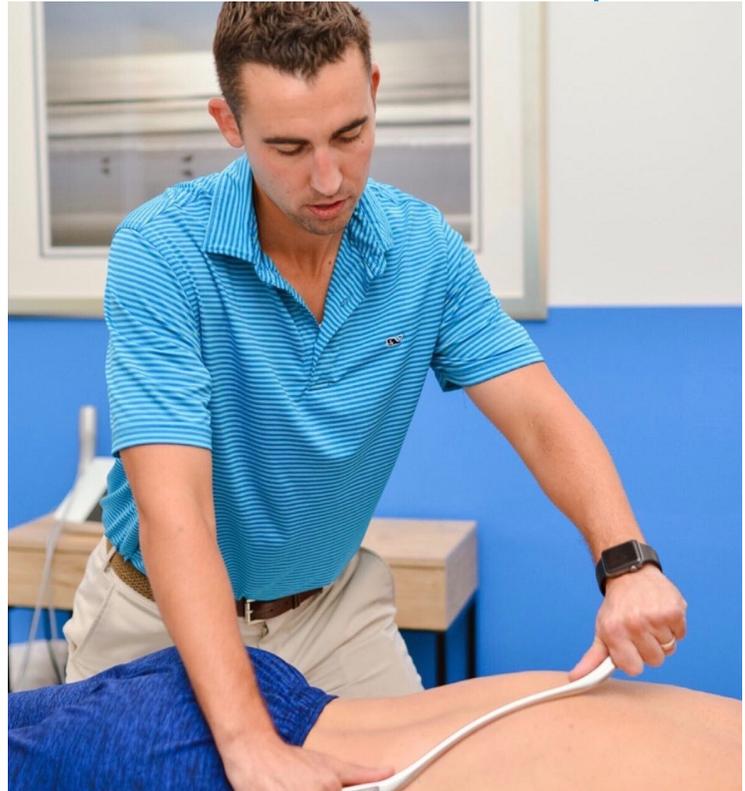
Physical therapists treat musculoskeletal injuries on a daily basis and try to determine the factors that cause an injury. From there, they facilitate the correct movement patterns to rehab the body after the injury, and teach preventative movements or exercises to keep the injury from reoccurring.

Some conditions are more severe and need to be treated surgically.

The best professionals for surgery are neurosurgeons or orthopedic surgeons. If the injury is due to a spinal mal-alignment then a chiropractor may be a very helpful resource.

Chiropractors are experts at joint mobilizations and maintain correct spinal positioning.

If the injury is due to a sore muscle then massage therapy might be a helpful resource.



Naples Premier Physical Therapy (NPPT) was designed to change the way physical therapy care is given. To be patient centered and to always provide one-on-one care with a Doctor of Physical Therapy.

Feelings of helplessness without options for pain relief and dysfunction are over. The main focus at NPPT is to deliver the most outstanding care that is designed to get you back to your normal life again, and to help you better understand what caused your problem and the solutions available.

Treatments at NPPT Therapy take place in a fully equipped gym and private treatment rooms for all manual and massage therapy. Call us to learn more about our services at 239-595-7833.

**LIVE A
PAIN-FREE LIFE**

AT- HOME EXERCISES

Table 1: Range of motion exercises (cervical and shoulder)



Table 2: Stretches for neck & shoulder

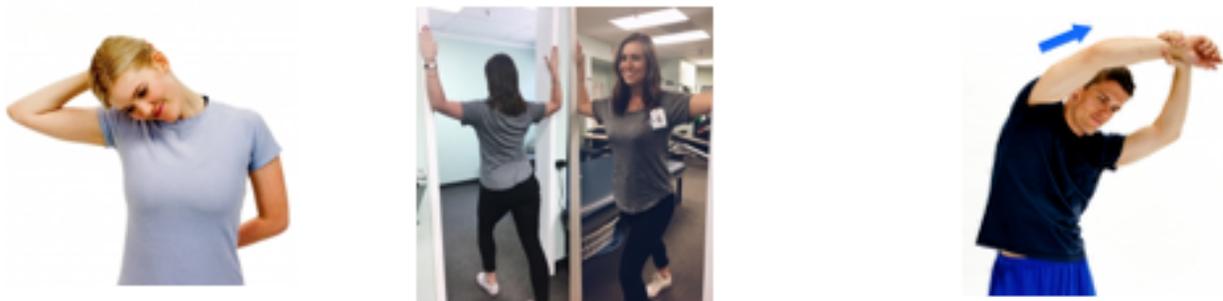


Table 3: Posture exercises

