



Discover Life Chiropractic

Better Health Naturally

# Neck Pain and Chiropractic Care

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# Chiropractic Care and Neck Pain

Neck pain is the third most common type of pain that many Americans suffer from. According to the survey conducted by the National Institute of Health Statistics (NIHS), 15% of Americans suffer from neck pain.<sup>1</sup> Wherein sufferers believe that neck pain is a natural aspect of aging, many Tacoma chiropractors see spinal misalignment as a common factor.

Neck pain is not a dangerous disease but it can cause debilitation that may prevent one from doing his or her tasks. And with the sedentary lifestyle of most Americans, the American Osteopathic Association (AOA) noted that one in two individuals may feel neck pain at some point in their lives.



## Understanding Neck Pain

Neck pain is not a serious condition and can easily be relieved. The neck is comprised of vertebral bones, muscles, and ligaments. And any inflammation, abnormality, or even injury of these parts can cause neck pain. People who suffer from neck pain suffer from different signs and symptoms. These include worsening pain on the affected area, tightness, and spasms of neck muscles, headache, and decreased mobility of the head.

## The Neck Anatomy

The neck is a well-engineered structure. It is not only made up of bones, but also muscles, nerves, tendons, and ligaments. The neck spine, called cervical spine, is a delicate structure that houses the spinal cord—the one responsible for sending messages and impulses to the brain.

The neck begins at the base of the skull and is connected to seven vertebral segments (C1 to C7) which connect to the thoracic spine also called the upper back. The smallest cervical vertebra nearest the skull is C1 and it gets bigger as they go down the thoracic spine. This is to ensure that the cervical vertebra can support the head.

Cervical vertebrae are comprised of cylindrical shaped bones that lie in front of the spinal cord. They are also stacked on top of the other to create a continuous column of neck bones. The cervical spine is highly at risk for developing painful conditions due to the stressed placed on it—even by just doing your simple daily activities. Below are the functions of the cervical vertebrae:

- **Supports the head and provides movement:** the neck vertebra supports the head. It can hold an average of 10 to 13 pounds. Aside from providing support, it also allows the head to bend sideways, forward and backward.
- **Protects the spinal cord:** The cervical vertebrae protect the spinal cord. A bundle of nerves from the brain extends to the lower back so that they can be connected to other parts of the body. It goes through the cervical spine and down to the thoracic spine for protection.

- **Facilitate blood flow to the brain:** The cervical spine consists of openings called vertical foramens that provide passage of arteries that supply blood to the brain. The vertebral foramen is a unique feature of the cervical spine.

## Facts about Neck Pain

Neck pain is one of the most common types of pain that affects the American population. In the data released by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), neck pain attributes to 15.1% of sufferers in the country.

Neck pain does not affect a particular demographic but data suggests that women are more likely to experience neck pain than men. Demographic studies also indicate that adults who are over the age of 65 are also more likely to suffer from neck pain due to



osteoporosis. Below are other interesting facts that you should know about neck pain.

- 70% of the American population will likely experience neck pain at least once in their lives.
- There is only a 1% chance that your neck pain is due to a serious medical condition.
- One in ten adults is suffering from neck pain in the United States.
- There were 13.2 million hospital visits in 2006 due to neck pain.

- 95% of neck pain diagnoses are for patients between the age of 18 and 64.

Neck pain may not be a serious condition, but they can cause a lot of problems for the sufferers. Early management is crucial to prevent problems from worsening. Thus, if the severity of the pain is not waning, consult your primary care provider or better yet your chiropractor.

## Causes of Neck Pain

The neck is a flexible structure that supports the head. While it is a strong structure, it is vulnerable to different conditions that may cause neck pain. Neck pain occurs for various reasons and below are the reasons why.



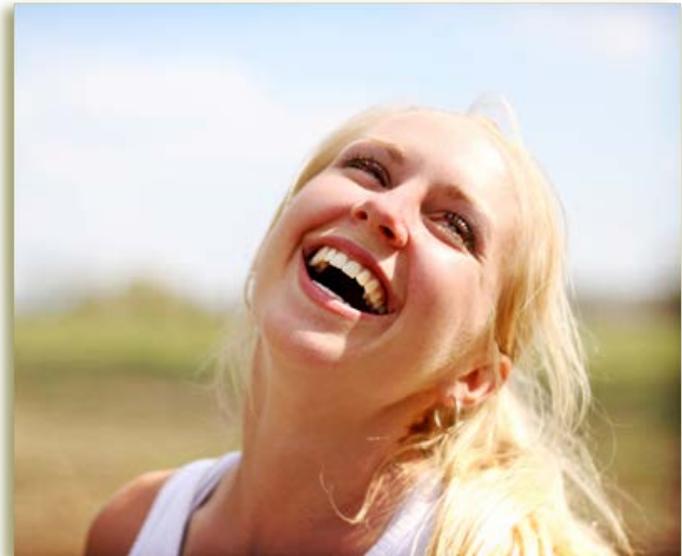
- **Muscle strain:** Overusing the neck muscle can cause neck pain. This means that hunching over the computer, reading in bed or even gritting your teeth can cause muscle strain. Muscle strain can also arise from poor posture, sleeping in a bad position, making jerking movements and working at a desk without changing positions.
- **Spinal Misalignment:** This involves vertebrae that are out of position and thus creates abnormal stresses on the surrounding joints, soft tissues, and nerves. This can come from poor posture, excessive head flexion, trauma, and emotional stress.

- **Injury:** Neck pain can also be attributed to injuries. For instance, whiplash which is caused by the sudden tugging or pulling or jerking of the head. This type of injury forces the ligaments and muscles to move beyond their normal range. This can lead to damage to the vertebrae if the impact is really strong. People who are involved in vehicular accidents are often prone to whiplash. Injuries may also cause the vertebrae disc to protrude which can add pressure on the nerve roots.
- **Worn out joints:** The joints on the neck vertebrae can also wear down especially as we age. Also called osteoarthritis, this condition causes the cartilage between the vertebrae to break down. The cartilage serves as the cushion and once this condition sets in, bone spurs on the vertebrae can occur.
- **Nerve compression:** Bone spurs and herniated disks on the neck vertebrae can cause neck pain as it can compress the nerve branching of the spinal cord. This produces a very painful sensation on the neck.
- **Diseases:** Neck pain may be a symptom of different kinds of diseases. For instance, people who suffer from meningitis experience inflammation in the brain and spinal cord which, in turn, causes stiff neck. This condition is fatal and should be dealt with immediately. Other diseases that can cause neck pain are as follows:
  - ***Rheumatoid arthritis:*** This condition is characterized by swelling of the joints. Bone spurs may also develop that can cause debilitating neck pain.
  - ***Osteoporosis:*** Osteoporosis is a condition wherein the bones become weakened. Thus, tiny fractures may occur. While this condition can happen in both hands and knees, the neck can also be affected.

- ***Fibromyalgia:*** This condition is characterized by having widespread muscle pain—all throughout the body.
- ***Spinal stenosis:*** Spinal stenosis is a condition when the spinal column narrows creating pressure on both the nerve roots and spinal cord. This is also often associated with arthritis and other conditions.

## Tacoma Chiropractic Care

There are many ways to manage neck pain and one of them is to use chiropractic techniques. Chiropractic care is a type of non-surgical and non-invasive treatment given to patients to reduce the severity of their neck pain. It is a conservative approach to treating neck pain. And as a matter of fact, according to the Palmer Center of Chiropractic



Research, manual therapy together with exercise was more effective in treating neck pain than any other noninvasive intervention.<sup>ii</sup> To date, there are many Tacoma chiropractors that you can approach to help you relieve your neck pain. Let's learn about chiropractic care for neck pain.

## Chiropractic Diagnosis of Neck Pain

When you visit your Tacoma chiropractor, your entire spine will be evaluated because other parts of the spine such as the lumbar (lower

back) and thoracic (upper back) areas might also be affected by your neck pain. Before the chiropractor will decide on the best approach to treat your pain, you will need to undergo a set of examinations to diagnose the specific reasons why you are suffering from neck pain. The areas of restricted movement will be determined including your spinal alignment and posture as these things can contribute to the progression of your neck pain. Moreover, your chiropractor will go through your medical history and may require you to take imaging tests like Surface EMG or X-ray to know the exact cause of the neck pain. By doing so, these will help your chiropractor to create a treatment plan customized to your needs. Along with the Tacoma chiropractic treatment, your chiropractor will also educate you regarding stress management, lifestyle changes, and nutrition in treating your neck pain.

## **Chiropractic Treatments**

Once your chiropractor has determined the exact reason of your neck pain, he or she will proceed with the treatment. There are several chiropractic treatment options that are available to neck pain sufferers. All these treatment options require spinal manipulation to correct the positioning of your vertebrae. Your chiropractor may use any of these treatments or a combination of treatments to treat your neck pain.

- **Spinal Adjustment:** This particular treatment involves the patient lying down while the chiropractor is manually moving the vertebrae gently from different directions to adjust the spinal segments.
- **Flexion and traction technique:** This chiropractic technique involves manipulation of the cervical spine by applying a pumping action on the disc instead of direct force.

- **Cervical drop technique:** While the patient is lying on his side on a special table with a head drop piece, the chiropractor places his or her hands over the spinal segment that requires adjustment. Pressure is applied to the vertebrae to reduce the restricted motion and fixation of the cervical spine. This technique is often instrument-assisted wherein the chiropractor uses an instrument to apply gentle force to the spine.
- **Therapeutic massage:** A therapeutic massage is used to relax tense muscle thus lessening the stiffness of the neck muscles. This chiropractic treatment is often done together with other techniques.



- **Trigger point therapy:** It is used to relieve the tightness and painful areas on the neck muscle. However, unlike therapeutic massage, the trigger point therapy looks for specific points in the muscle where the pain and stiffness has likely originated.

Aside from these chiropractic techniques, your chiropractor may also recommend you to engage in therapeutic exercises to improve the range of motion that your neck can do. Neck exercises can also halt the progression of your neck pain.

## Conclusion

Neck pains may not be serious, but they can cause a lot of discomfort. While there are many treatment options that deal and manage neck pain, chiropractic care remains one of the most effective methods. If your doctor hasn't mentioned chiropractic care as a treatment option or you have been trying to manage it on your own don't wait any longer. Call Discover Life Chiropractic in Tacoma today and see if chiropractic care can get you back to your old self again.

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<sup>i</sup> [AAPM Facts and Figures on Pain](#)

<sup>ii</sup> [Chiropractic Evidence Summary](#)