



Student Health Center

UNC Wilmington

INSTRUCTION SHEET: NECK STRAIN

The Student Health Provider has diagnosed a strain of the muscles and ligaments in your neck. At present, there is no sign of a more serious injury to the spinal cord or vertebrae (bones).

A neck strain is a common injury. Symptoms include pain, soreness, and stiffness in the neck, especially on turning the head. Neck strains can result from automobile accidents, athletic injuries, exercise classes, or even awkward sleeping positions.

The strain is unlikely to result in a permanent neck problem, and symptoms should disappear gradually over the next few days to a week.

The symptoms are often worse in the morning, just after waking. The neck muscles are not stretched during sleep, and may tighten up.

MEASURES YOU SHOULD TAKE TO HELP TREAT YOUR NECK STRAIN:

- 1- Rest and relax as much as possible. Resting the neck allows the muscles to heal more quickly, with less pain. Relaxing lessens tension in the neck muscles. Avoid driving a car or other activities where you must turn your head repeatedly.
- 2- Apply cold the first 24 hours after injury. After 24 hours, apply heat to the neck. Moist heat is most helpful. Stand under a shower, soak in a tub, apply warm wet towels, or use a hot water bottle. An electric heating pad can also be used, but be careful not to burn the skin.
- 3- Over-the-counter pain medications can relieve discomfort associated with a neck strain. Acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen, or naproxen can be taken, depending on individual preference. Ibuprofen or naproxen also have an anti-inflammatory action, which can help heal the injury more quickly.
- 4- The provider may prescribe a muscle relaxant or stronger pain medication. Take the medicine only as directed. Do not take the medication and drive, climb a ladder, operate machinery, or do any other dangerous activity.
- 5- If your symptoms worsen or change, see your personal/referral doctor or go to the closest emergency department promptly. Specifically, seek care promptly if there is severe, incapacitating pain, or loss of movement in the arms or legs.
- 6- If your symptoms continue longer than a week without steady improvement, return to the Student Health Center. The provider and staff may recommend and help you make an appointment with your personal/referral doctor.