

Headache and Neck Pain Home Program

It is estimated 67% of the population suffer with neck pain at some point in their lives.

The majority of people with headache and neck pain have common movement dysfunction patterns.

Creating balance between muscle groups alleviates tension on the spine and therefore reduces pain and headache.

An often confusing but important point to understand is that muscles that are tight can also be weak, in fact it is often the weakness that is causing them to become tight. It is possible to have tight (short) weak muscles as well as long weak muscles.

A strong healthy muscle is neither tight, loose, long nor short. This is the goal: to create balance in the neck and shoulder girdle through strong muscles.

Muscles have an ideal resting length, this is the one which creates our perfect posture. Over time through bad posture and habits, our muscles actually change their resting length. The muscles that are constantly on stretch actually grow longer and the muscles that are constantly bunched up form new cross links and become shorter.

Through good habits and exercise we can correct these changes and bring our muscles back to their ideal length and strength.

Common short (tight) muscles	Common long, weak muscles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pectoral major and minor • Sub occipital neck extensors • Upper trapezius / levator scapulae • Shoulder internal rotators including latissimus dorsi • Scalene and sternocleidomastoid (causes upper cervical extension) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep neck flexors • Scapular stabilisers (lower and middle trapezius, rhomboids and serratus anterior) • Shoulder external rotators

Another common tendency with cervical spine dysfunction is a stiff thoracic spine and weak core muscles (both abdominal and gluteal).

Please see the attached exercise program to address these imbalances. You will need to complete this program for at least 12 weeks.

Also aim to walk for a minimum of 20 minutes (moderate pace) every day to boost your serotonin levels.

Other than your exercises there are few essential life style changes you need to make:

- Correct your posture: think tall all the time, avoid sitting and holding your head up with your hands.
- Consider your ergonomics especially your computer set up and how you use your digital devices. In particular, avoid a forward chin position and sustained head and neck rotation.
- Learn to breathe properly: gentle breathing in and out through the **nose** with movement occurring at the solar plexus not in the shoulder region. Breathing should be silent and invisible. You should feel the sides of your chest wall expanding as you breathe in, not your shoulders rising or your belly expanding.
- Manage your stress levels, you may need to start a meditation practice. There are many great apps (e.g.- head space, smiling mind etc) to help you get started. This is particularly important if you clench or grind your teeth.
- Get adequate sleep. Aim to sleep with your head in a neutral position not rotated or side flexed. Aim for an absolute minimum of 8 hours every night.
- Eat clean food: avoid processed food, excess alcohol and coffee. Eat plenty of vegetables!
- Drink a lot of water (at least 33ml per kg of body weight / day) add an extra 250ml for every caffeinated drink (such as coffee) you have.
- Avoid carrying anything other than a very light bag on your shoulder
- Avoid extending the head / looking up for long periods
- Watch the position of your head while exercising – ensure you maintain a neutral head position, (i.e. – not look up or around).
- Do not over do it when exercising particularly when using your arms and upper body.