



Shoulder Pain & Neck Pain

Signs & Symptoms

- The pain can be mild to severe. It can be felt in one spot, in a large area, or travel to another area. Movement can cause the pain or make it worse.
- Stiffness and/or swelling may occur.



Tension can cause neck muscles to go into spasms.

Causes

- Overuse and wear and tear on neck and shoulder muscles and joints.
- Strains. Broken or dislocated shoulder.
- Poor posture. Awkward sleeping positions. Sleeping on a soft mattress.
- Pinched nerve. Pain from a pinched nerve usually runs down one side of the arm.
- **Frozen shoulder.** This can result from lack of use due to pain from an injury. At first, pain occurs with movement. Over time, the pain gets better, but stiffness remains.
- **Torn rotator cuff.** This is a tear in a ligament that holds the shoulder in place. Symptoms are pain at the top and outer sides of the shoulders, especially when you raise or extend your arm. You may also feel or hear a click when the shoulder is moved.

- **Tendinitis.** This is swelling of a tendon (tissue that connects a muscle to bone). Left untreated, tendinitis can turn into “frozen shoulder.” “Wry” neck is a similar problem.
- **Bursitis.** This is swelling of the sac (bursa) that surrounds the shoulder joint. Bursitis can be caused by injury, infection, overuse, arthritis, or gout.
- A whiplash injury.
- **Osteoarthritis.** (See at www.HealthyLearn.com.)
- Infections that cause swollen lymph nodes in the neck.

Questions to Ask

With shoulder pain or neck pain, do you have any of these problems?

- A serious head or neck injury.
- Any **heart attack warning sign** listed at www.HealthyLearn.com.
- Any **symptom of meningitis** listed at www.HealthyLearn.com.

YES



NO

After an injury to the neck or shoulder, do you have any of these problems?

- The shoulder popped out of place and back into place.
- A burning, shooting pain or weakness is felt in the shoulders.
- The shoulder looks misshaped.
- The pain is very severe.
- Your arm is numb and can't be moved at all.

YES



NO

Flowchart continued on next page



Treatment

Treatment for shoulder pain and/or neck pain depends on the cause. Emergency medical care is needed for:

- A serious injury.
- A broken bone.
- A heart attack.
- **Meningitis.** This is an infection of the membranes that surround the brain.

Self-care can treat less serious causes of shoulder pain and/or neck pain.



Get more information from:

HealthyLearn®
www.HealthyLearn.com

National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS)
www.nih.gov/niams

Shoulder Pain & Neck Pain, Continued

Do you have any of these problems?

- Severe or persistent pain, swelling, or spasms in a shoulder.
- Painful and stiff shoulder that is very hard to move at all.
- Pain, tenderness, and limited motion in the shoulder.



NO

Do you have any of these problems?

- Throbbing shoulder pain or numbness that goes down the shoulder into the arm.
- A possible whiplash injury after being hit from behind.
- Fever and redness or swelling around the shoulder.



NO

Do you have both of these **signs of a gallbladder attack**?

- Pain in the right shoulder.
- Pain in the right upper abdomen.



NO

Is your neck pain or shoulder pain severe enough to interfere with sleep? Or, does the pain not get better after using self-care for 7 days?



NO



Self-Care / Prevention

For Pain

- Take an over-the-counter medicine for pain and/or swelling.
- To relieve tension and improve circulation, take walks. Start with 3 to 5 walks a day, each lasting 5 to 10 minutes. Gradually increase walking times.

For Bursitis, Tendinitis, or an Injury That Does Not Appear Serious

- Use **R.I.C.E.** (See at www.HealthyLearn.com.)
- Try liniments and balms. These provide a cooling or warming sensation, but only mask the pain. They do not promote healing.



Shoulder Pain & Neck Pain, Continued

To Treat Neck Pain from a Whiplash Injury or Pinched Nerve

See a doctor anytime your motor vehicle is hit from the rear because the accident can cause a whiplash injury. After first checking with your doctor, do these things to ease neck discomfort:

- Rest as much as you can by lying on your back.
- Use cold and hot packs.
- Improve your posture. When you sit, use a chair with a straight back. Make sure your buttocks go all the way to the chair's back. When you stand, pull in your chin and stomach.
- Use a cervical (neck) pillow or a rolled hand towel under your neck.
- Avoid activities that may aggravate your injury.
- Cover your neck with a scarf if you go outside when the weather is cold.

Ways to Prevent Shoulder Pain & Neck Pain

- Avoid repeated activities that twist or put strain on the neck and shoulders. When you do repeated tasks, use proper posture, equipment, and techniques.
- Wear seat belts in vehicles. Use protective gear when you take part in sporting events.
- If you are out of condition, strengthen your muscles gradually.
- Don't sleep on your stomach. You may twist your neck in this position. Use a firm polyester pillow, a neck (cervical) pillow, or a rolled towel under your neck.

- Practice good posture. Stand straight. Don't let your shoulders slump, your head droop, or your lower back slouch.
- When you carry things, such as a shoulder bag, switch from one shoulder to the other.
- Don't prop a telephone between your ear and shoulder.
- Stretch and warm up before activities that require joint movement, such as sports.
- Do stretching and strengthening exercises to keep your shoulder, neck, and arm muscles strong and flexible. See exercises below.

- **Shoulder Stretch:** Reach your right arm across your chest. With your left hand, grasp your arm just above the elbow. Gently pull your arm farther across your body until you feel a stretch in the back of your shoulder. Hold for 30 seconds. Rest and repeat. Do the same with your left arm.



- **Neck and Shoulder Stretch:** Tilt your head forward and let it hang. Relax your neck and shoulders. Slowly, roll your head to one side then back to the front and then slowly roll it to the other side. (Do not roll your neck backward.) Repeat 10 times.

