

Neck Strain Rehabilitation Exercises

Do these exercises only if you do not have pain or numbness running down your arm or into your hand. The first 6 exercises are meant to help your neck remain flexible. Do not do any exercises that make your neck pain worse.

- **Active neck rotation:** Sit in a chair, keeping your neck, shoulders, and trunk straight. First, turn your head slowly to the right. Move it gently to the point of pain. Move it back to the forward position. Relax. Then move it to the left. Repeat 10 times.
- **Active neck side bend:** Sit in a chair, keeping your neck, shoulders, and trunk straight. Tilt your head so that your right ear moves toward your right shoulder. Move it to the point of pain. Then tilt your head so your left ear moves toward your left shoulder. Make sure you do not rotate your head while tilting or raise your shoulder toward your head. Repeat this exercise 10 times in each direction.
- **Neck flexion:** Sit in a chair, keeping your neck, shoulders, and trunk straight. Bend your head forward, reaching your chin toward your chest. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 10 times.
- **Neck extension:** Sit in a chair, keeping your neck, shoulders, and trunk straight. Bring your head back so that your chin is pointing toward the ceiling. Repeat 10 times.
- **Chin tuck:** Place your fingertips on your chin and gently push your head straight back as if you are trying to make a double chin. Keep looking forward as your head moves back. Hold 5 seconds and repeat 5 times.
- **Scalene stretch:** This stretches the neck muscles that attach to your ribs. Sitting in an upright position, clasp both hands behind your back, lower your left shoulder, and tilt your head toward the right. Hold this position for 15 to 30 seconds and then come back to the starting position. Lower your right shoulder and tilt your head toward the left until you feel a stretch. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 3 times on each side.
- **Isometric neck flexion:** Sit tall, eyes straight ahead, and chin level. Place your palm against your forehead and gently push your forehead into your palm. Hold for 5 seconds and release. Do 3 sets of 5.



- **Isometric neck extension:** Sit tall, eyes straight ahead, and chin level. Clasp your hands together and place them behind your head. Press the back of your head into your palms. Hold 5 seconds and release. Do 3 sets of 5.
- **Isometric neck side bend:** Sit tall, eyes straight ahead, and chin level. Place the palm of your hand at the side of your temple and press your temple into the palm of your hand. Hold 5 seconds and release. Do 3 sets of 5 on each side.
- **Head lift: Neck curl:** Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor. Tuck your chin and lift your head toward your chest, keeping your shoulders on the floor. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 10 times.
- **Head lift: Neck side bend:** Lie on your right side with your right arm lying straight out. Rest your head on your arm, then lift your head slowly toward your left shoulder. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 10 times. Switch to your left side and repeat the exercise, lifting your head toward your right shoulder.
- **Neck extension on hands and knees:** Get on your hands and knees and look down at the floor. Keep your back straight and let your head slowly drop toward your chest. Then tuck your chin slightly and lift your head up until your neck is level with your back. Hold this position for 5 seconds. Repeat 10 times.
- **Scapular squeeze:** While sitting or standing with your arms by your sides, squeeze your shoulder blades together and hold for 5 seconds. Do 3 sets of 10.

Written by Tammy White, MS, PT, and Phyllis Clapis, PT, DHSc, OCS, for RelayHealth. Published by RelayHealth.

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Active neck rotation



Active neck sidebend



Neck flexion



Neck extension



Chin tuck



Scalene stretch



Isometric neck flexion