

## ADVICE SHEET FOR NECK PAIN

### WHAT IS NECK PAIN

Neck pain is a common complaint for many people with many different backgrounds. Pain is an unpleasant output of the brain which is your body's way of telling you that it is not very happy. Neck pain can be felt in the neck itself, the muscles at the base of the neck, the base of the skull and can refer pain up to the skull or down along the shoulders and into the arm.

### WHAT CAUSES NECK PAIN

There are many different causes of neck pain. These are divided into traumatic neck pain, such as whiplash associated disorder following a road traffic accident, or non-traumatic neck pain. Non-traumatic neck pain is often the result of prolonged sitting at a computer with the same posture for hours on end. This can lead to chronic muscle "tightness" as your muscles constantly have to hold you in the same position with no respite day-in and day-out. Over time, those muscles become overloaded, and as a protective mechanism, the nervous system sends signals to those muscles to spasm. There is rarely any significant injury to the spine itself in non-traumatic neck pain, and even though there may be some structural changes on an MRI report, this may not even be related to the current pain.

### SYMPTOMS

- Pain in the neck, shoulders, and sometimes down into the arms
- Tingling or "pins and needles" down the arms
- Upper limb weakness
- Headaches
- Neck stiffness

### HOW TO LOOK AFTER IT AT HOME

Though it may initially feel uncomfortable, it is important to keep moving as much as possible. We all slouch in our chairs from time to time, but unfortunately a lot of us are guilty of remaining in that same slouched position for 8 hours a day, every single day at work, which often leads to some discomfort. By changing your postures in work, you give your muscles a break from statically holding you in the same position, helping to mitigate the negative impact that prolonged sitting can have on your bodies.

Where possible, you should also take short breaks from the desk every hour or so, this will give your muscles a break from sitting all day.

At home, the best thing you can do is to be as physically active as possible. This can be in the form of strength training in the gym, running, swimming, cycling or walking. It is recommended that we all should get 30 minutes of physical activity per day and incorporate resistance training 2-3 times per week to keep our bodies healthy and strong. Not only does exercise help with mitigating the effects of long hours at the desk, it also has many other benefits such as reducing your risk of cardiovascular disease, obesity and reducing stress from everyday life. On top of this, you can apply heat to the muscles which will help your nervous system and muscles to relax.

### PROFESSIONAL TREATMENT

It is recommended that you visit your nearest Chartered Physiotherapist to accurately assess any injuries or aches that you have. There are many methods of providing symptom relief for your neck pain. This may consist of manual therapy, dry needling or acupuncture. You will then be provided with a home exercise programme which will target the primary driver of your pain.

### IMPORTANT TAKE HOME MESSAGES

Pain does not mean harm. This is a very important take home message. Any range of motion restriction or pain does not necessarily mean you have a structural injury. Your spine is a very, very strong structure that is designed to allow you to move freely. Though it may be very sensitive initially, it is rare that there is any structural injury to the spine itself.