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Customer Services Department

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Contact details

The Minor Injuries Units are open every day of the year, including Bank Holidays.

Minor Injuries Unit Cumberland Centre

Damerel Close
Plymouth
PL1 4JZ

Tel: 01752 434390

Opening times: 8:30am - 9pm

Minor Injuries Unit South Hams Hospital

Plymouth Road
Kingsbridge
TQ7 1AT

Tel: 01548 852349

Opening times: 9am - 5pm

Minor Injuries Unit Tavistock Hospital

Spring Hill
Tavistock
PL19 8LD

Tel: 01822 612233

Opening times: 8am - 10pm

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 Livewell Southwest

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Neck Pain Information & Advice



Minor Injuries Unit

Cumberland Centre
South Hams Hospital
Tavistock Hospital

Introduction

Sudden onset neck pain is common. In most cases it is not due to a serious disease or structural problem and often the exact cause is not clear unless from a road traffic accident.

What is the cause of neck pain?

Non-specific neck pain is very common. This is sometimes called 'simple' or 'mechanical' neck pain. Often the exact cause is not known. It may include minor sprains and strains to muscles or ligaments in the neck. Bad posture may be a contributing factor in some cases. For example, neck pain is more common in people who spend much of their working day at a desk, with a 'bent forward' posture.

Acute (sudden onset) torticollis. This is sometimes called 'wry neck'. A torticollis is when the head becomes twisted to one side and it is very painful to move. It may be due to a minor strain to a muscle or ligament in the neck. It is common for people to go to bed feeling fine and to wake up the next morning with an acute torticollis. The pain usually eases and resolves over a few days without any treatment.

A '**whiplash' jolt to the neck**, most commonly due to a car accident, may cause neck pain. This can be very distressing due to the nature of the injury. Thankfully our necks are resilient and serious injury rarely occurs. Often there is considerable muscle spasm to protect your neck, which can be very painful and make it difficult to move. However, research shows that early movement is the best treatment.

Degeneration (wear and tear) of the spinal bones is a common cause of persistent neck pain in older people. This is called cervical spondylosis. Most people over the age of 50 have some degree of spondylosis, often without symptoms.

Cervical radiculopathy is when a nerve is irritated in the cervical (neck) region). As well as neck pain, there may be symptoms such as numbness, pins and

needles, pain and weakness in parts of an arm supplied by that nerve.

What tests to you need?

The Nurse Practitioner will have carried out a full clinical examination which is much more accurate at diagnosing your neck pain than x-rays as most images are negative and will not speed up your recovery.

When should you go to the Accident & Emergency Department

On rare occasions you may need to go to A&E if:

You have had a significant road accident or sporting injury and you have tenderness to the bones in your neck.

You have suffered a head injury and have neurological symptoms such as dizziness, headache, double vision, slurred speech or have weakness to your face or limbs.

You have had a collapse.

You have a history of cancer, particularly if your neck pain is worse at night.

When should you see your GP?

You should see your GP if your neck pain is continually affecting your sleep and daily activities. Your GP can refer you for physiotherapy.

How to treat your neck pain

Self-help measures are the initial treatment for most neck pain.

Use simple pain relief such as paracetamol or ibuprofen - if your pain is persisting, see your GP about prescribing stronger painkillers.

Try gentle movement and exercises within comfort to maintain range of movement of your neck - this

increases blood flow to the tissues and promotes healing.

Try hot packs over the muscles in your neck and shoulder area to reduce muscle spasm.

Reduce activities that aggravate your pain, and allow your neck to rest - avoid heavy lifting and repetitive tasks and address any issues at work that may be irritating your neck.

Place a towel in the base of your pillow to provide support for your neck whilst you sleep.

Have a positive and realistic outlook as your neck pain will get better but may take some time, with good and bad days.

Neck exercises - see neck exercise leaflet

It is important to maintain the range of movement in your neck to prevent it from becoming stiff and to promote tissue healing. The exercise below should be performed gently, within pain limits, increasing the movement as pain allows.

Move your head to one side until you feel a stretch. Repeat on the other side - 10 times every 2 hours.

Tilt your head towards your shoulder until you feel a stretch on the opposite side. Using your hand, gently pull your head further to the side and hold for 5 - 10 seconds. Repeat on the other side.

Pull your chin in, keeping head and back straight. Hold at the end position and feel the stretch in your neck. Repeat 10 times every 2 hours.