

Cervical Radiculopathy



Information for Patients

This leaflet has been written to give you the right information about cervical radiculopathy and what you can do to help with your recovery.

What is cervical radiculopathy?

The term cervical relates to your neck and the term radiculopathy refers to irritation of your nerves, in particular, what is called your nerve root.

A cervical radiculopathy is a complaint that involves the irritation of one, or more than one, of the nerve roots as it exits your neck. It is often characterised by neck and arm pain with tingling or numbness into the arm or hand.

What are the common symptoms?

Pain: Cervical radiculopathies tend to cause pain and discomfort in and around the neck, but sometimes may travel to the shoulder blade and even to the arm.

Pins and needles/numbness: Pins and needles, numbness (reduced or altered feeling), a feeling of heaviness in the arm/hand or simply a 'weird' feeling that is hard to describe can be a sign of an upset nerve.

Stiffness: Your neck may feel stiff or tight. This is likely linked to temporary changes in how your muscles are working.

Head feeling 'too heavy': This is common and is not a concerning symptom. A painful neck will make the muscles around it work differently and eventually they can get tired and grumpy.

Worry: Pain can often make you feel vulnerable and can be concerning, especially if it is new and/or is affecting your normal everyday life. Reassuringly, these feelings are normal and it is worth reminding yourself your neck can be sore and nerves can get irritated, but they can improve.

What can I do to help myself?

Calm it down: In a lot of cases there will be things your neck likes to do and some things that it is less happy to do after your symptoms started. Calming it down simply means looking at the things it doesn't like and trying to make some adjustments or changes to make it easier for yourself. For example, your neck might get more tired or painful than it used to if you're working on a computer or watching TV. It might be that taking more breaks, introducing some gentle movement or just using some head support makes life a little easier whilst your neck is recovering. You may find resting your arm in different positions may help, for example putting your hand in your pocket or on top of your head.

Pain control: Some people will choose to manage their pain with pain relief, whilst some may choose to avoid medication. Applying something warm around your neck may also be useful in helping with some of the pain (do remember to wrap your hot water bottle in a towel before applying it to your skin to avoid burns).

Get your neck moving: Movement is medicine for your neck. Any movement is good movement, even if it is sore, however if something is really painful, then working around that movement is sensible.

Your neck is strong and that won't have changed since your symptoms began. Although it is sore, it remains robust and moving your neck as early as you can, will help improve your chances of a better overall outcome.

Will it get better?

For most people, neck/arm pain will not be a pleasant experience but reassuringly, it does have the potential to get better. Understanding the issue as best you can and by adjusting what is sore to then allow you to explore some exercise/s, is often the best formula for success.

If you would like to know more about radiculopathies or find a greater choice of exercises, you can explore our dedicated webpage: [Norfolk and Waveney MSK services 'cervical radiculopathy'](#)

Exercises



With your painful arm supported on a pillow/arm rest as in the picture, gently look down at the floor. Whilst still looking down, turn your head gently away from the painful arm and then return to the middle. Gently move your head in this way rhythmically.

Complete little and often throughout the day.



Sitting or standing. Straighten your arm and at the same time tilt your head towards your hand, then bend your elbow and at the same time tilt your head away from your hand.

Complete this slowly and rhythmically for 30 seconds, little and often throughout the day.



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