

Emergency Department

Neck Pain

General Information

Neck pain is usually caused by a problem or injury to the muscles or ligaments around the bones in the neck. The most common cause is a car accident, but it can occur for no apparent reason at all. The pain is usually worse for the first two days, then starts to improve. It usually gets better over a period of 10 days.

Instructions

1. Doing neck exercises and moving your neck will help to speed up healing. Gradually increase your level of activity over the week.
2. Take any medications your doctor may have prescribed for you, or take non-prescription medications such as ibuprofen (Motrin or Advil) or acetaminophen (Tylenol).
3. Put ice on the area to reduce pain. Apply an ice pack (covered with a cloth) for 15–20 minutes at a time, a few times a day.
4. Put heat on the area to reduce pain and stiffness. Take a hot shower or hot bath, or put a heating pad on the area. Do not use heat for more than 20 minutes at a time.
5. Be careful driving because you may not be able to do shoulder checks for oncoming traffic.

Return to Emergency if any of the following develop:

- A sudden severe pain in your neck.
- Loss of strength or feeling in your arms or legs.
- Inability to control your bladder or bowel function

Contact your Family Doctor if any of the following develop:

- Your pain does not improve after treating it at home for 1 week.
- You are unable to control your pain using the instructions above.
- You run out of prescribed medications.

If any imaging was done while you were in the Emergency Department it will be reviewed by a doctor in the hospital and initial results shared with you before you leave. A doctor specializing in reading images (a Radiologist) will review those same images within a few days of your visit and will send a final written report to the doctor who ordered them and to your Family Doctor to share with you.

For more information or questions contact HealthLinkBC at 811.

For more copies, go online at <http://vch.eduhealth.ca> or
email pchem@vch.ca and quote Catalogue No. **FB.700.N281**
© Vancouver Coastal Health, February 2017

The information in this document is intended solely for the
person to whom it was given by the health care team.
www.vch.ca