

## What are neck spasms?

Neck spasms are involuntary contractions of the muscles in your neck. The muscles become tight, hard, and painful.

## How do they occur?

Neck spasms may occur from an injury, overuse, poor posture, or stress. For example, it is common for a person doing a lot of computer work to feel his or her neck stiffen. Spasms may even occur from an uncomfortable night's sleep.

## What are the symptoms?

The muscles in your neck feel hard, tight, and painful. When the muscles that extend from your shoulders to your head go into spasm, the spasms may even cause headaches. You may have tender spots in your neck, sometimes called trigger points, that cause pain elsewhere.

## How are they diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will review your medical history and examine your neck.

## How are they treated?

- **Stretching:** Spasms are best treated with stretching exercises.
- **Massage:** You may be able to massage your neck yourself by finding the tight muscles and putting deep pressure on these muscles. You might also get a massage from a friend or therapist.
- **Medicine:** Your healthcare provider may recommend an anti-inflammatory medicine, such as ibuprofen or naproxen, or may prescribe a muscle relaxant (adults aged 65 years and older should not take non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medicine for more than 7 days without their healthcare provider's approval).
- **Ice:** If your neck spasm has just occurred, put ice packs on your neck for 20 to 30 minutes three to four times a day.
- **Moist heat:** Sometimes, especially with recurrent spasms, moist heat can help. Put warm, moist towels on your neck for 20 minutes, or take hot showers or baths.
- **Physical therapy:** Your healthcare provider may recommend seeing a physi-

cal therapist for an exercise program and other treatments.

- **Injection:** If the above treatments do not help the spasm get better, your healthcare provider may recommend a shot of an anesthetic or a medicine like cortisone into the muscle.
- **Stress management:** Neck spasms are a common physical symptom caused by stress or depression. Identification of these problems and treatment of them may help considerably with neck spasms.

## When can I return to my sport or activity?

You may return to your sport or activity when:

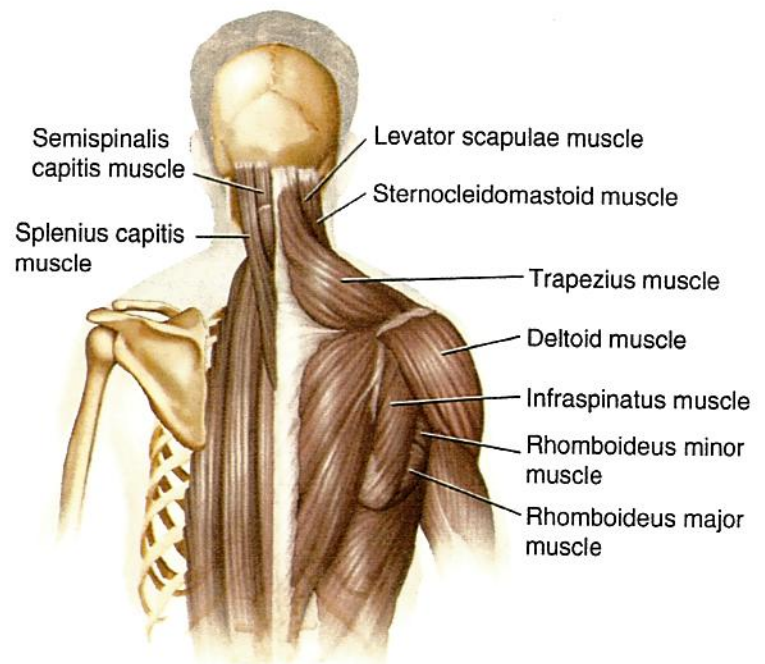
- You no longer have neck pain.
- You can move your neck fully and comfortably.

## How can I help prevent neck spasms?

Know what you can do about the common causes of neck spasm: overuse, stress, and poor posture. For example, use good posture at your computer terminal, take frequent breaks, and do stretching exercises.

When you first feel tightness or pain in your neck, start the treatment that has helped you the most. Treating early, mild symptoms right away can often stop the symptoms from becoming worse.

## NECK SPASMS



# NECK SPASM REHABILITATION EXERCISES

You may do these exercises right away.

## 1. NECK ROTATION WITH FLEXION:

**Right:** Turn your head to the right and clasp your hands behind your head. Let the weight of your arms pull your chin to the right side of your chest. Relax. Hold for a count of 15. Do this 3 times.

**Left:** Turn your head to the left and clasp your hands behind your head. Let the weight of your arms pull your chin to the left side of your chest. Relax. Hold for a count of 15. Do this 3 times.



NECK ROTATION WITH FLEXION



CHIN TUCK

**2. 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.

**3. 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.

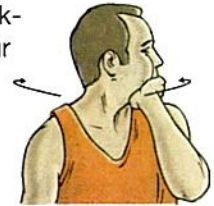


SCALENE STRETCH

## 4. NECK ROTATION STRETCH

**Right side:** Rotate your neck by looking over your right shoulder. Lift your right hand and place your palm on the left side of your chin. Push your chin with your palm toward your right shoulder. Hold for a count of 10. Do this 3 times.

**Left side:** Rotate your neck by looking over your left shoulder. Lift your left hand and place your palm on the right side of your chin. Push your chin with your palm toward your left shoulder. Hold for a count of 10. Do this 3 times.



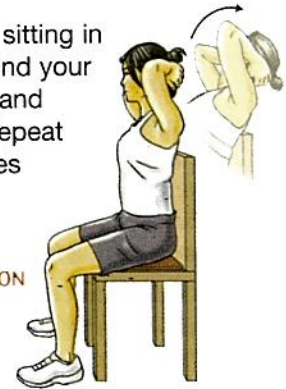
NECK ROTATION STRETCH

**5. 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.



SCAPULAR SQUEEZE

**6. THORACIC EXTENSION:** While sitting in a chair, clasp both arms behind your head. Gently arch backward and look up toward the ceiling. Repeat 10 times. Do this several times per day.



THORACIC EXTENSION