Have Persistent Neck Pain? Try These Home Remedies

by ALISON RICHARDS

What Is Chronic Neck Pain?

Chronic neck pain is persistent pain in the neck that does not go away quickly or over a period of a few months. There may not be a specific reason for the pain, or it might be related to a previous injury or condition. It may be difficult to diagnose quickly, and the lack of successful treatment for long-term pain can affect the lifestyle of a person living with chronic pain tremendously. They might not be able to work, drive, sleep, and they can become extremely lethargic, depressed or anxious.

What Is the Difference Between Chronic and Acute Pain?

Acute pain tends to come on quickly and is usually the result of an identifiable action or injury. There is a specific cause such as twisting your neck into an awkward position, a whiplash injury or infection for example. It can be extremely painful but tends to heal over a period of days, weeks or even gradually over a few months. It may heal naturally or with treatment.

Chronic pain is longer lasting and usually attributed to ongoing pain of more than three months. It is not necessarily identified by an action or diagnosed quickly. Therefore, treatment is not always successful at first and you may have to go through a variety of diagnostics before an effective treatment plan is found. The pain levels can vary between low but constant, to something more intense.

Sometimes pain is referred to as sub-acute, which is attributed to pain that has lasted more than six weeks but less than three months.

What Can Cause Chronic Pain in the Neck?

There are a variety of causes of chronic neck pain. It is not necessarily always brought on by an injury, although whiplash from a car accident is a common cause, as is a trapped nerve caused by a sudden movement.

You may have slept awkwardly, causing the neck to lock up (pain in back of neck). Neck pain can also be brought on by poor posture when sitting or standing in one position for too long. Or, maybe stress has made you hold all your tension in the shoulder and neck region.

As the body ages, the bones and discs can wear, causing the joints to rub against each other, which triggers irritation. This is known as cervical spondylosis. The joints may become arthritic or there might be inflammation in the area, causing stiffness and pain.

What Are the Treatment Options for Neck Pain?

It is vital that you seek immediate medical advice if you have persistent pain, severe pain, numbness or tingling in your arms and legs, swollen lymph nodes or if you have been involved in an accident.

Neck pain will often go away of its own accord with a mix of rest, exercise, painkillers and anti-inflammatories, such as ibuprofen, naproxen or acetaminophen. If you have tried these and your pain does not subside, you will need to go to a medical professional for treatment.

You might be referred to a physiotherapist, chiropractor or osteopath initially. If no successful treatment is found, your doctor may do blood tests and take x-rays or an MRI scan to rule out any underlying conditions. Only once a diagnosis is made can you determine the ongoing treatment, which could be in the form of medication, cortisone steroids, nerve-blocking injections or surgery.

Chronic pain affects how your brain interprets pain signals due to changes in the nerves. Sometimes medication such as Amitriptyline is prescribed as this dulls the nerve endings and reduces the pain signals to the brain. In higher doses it is sometimes used as an antidepressant, so this can also help patients suffering from chronic pain with their mental health.

Ways to Alleviate Chronic Neck Pain at Home

There are several ways you can help alleviate your pain at home.

It is vital that you maintain a good posture when sitting, standing and moving around. Depending on your medical diagnosis and history, gentle exercise is usually recommended with added specific neck exercises to be completed a couple of times a day.

It is also important to keep the neck supported in bed. It is recommended that you sleep on your back with support under the neck and knees, but some people prefer to sleep on their sides. In either position, you should use a low pillow and consider using additional neck support, such as a tightly rolled-up towel, soft foam roller or beanie pillow that you can mold into the shape of your neck.

Neck braces or supports for daily wear are not recommended unless advised by your doctor for a specific cause. It is important that your neck can move freely.

There are lots of products that might help which you may already have in the house or are able to buy over the counter. These include various rubs and heat and ice presses for around the neck and shoulders.

You can buy several preparations from a pharmacy or grocery stores, which should be used according to instructions, such as:

- A deep-heat muscle rub
- A bio-freeze spray or gel
- A painkilling rub or spray that might contain Non-steroidal Anti-inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs) or CBD (Cannabidiol) oil.

You can also use various home remedies for gentle, natural pain relief.

Heat presses could include:

- A microwaveable lavender or wheat wrap to heat and place around your neck for a brief period
- A half-filled hot water bottle wrapped in a towel or pillowcase held against your neck.

Ice presses could include:

- Freezing a wheat neck wrap before use
- Placing a washcloth or folded hand towel in the refrigerator or freezer before use
- Wrapping a bag of frozen peas or sweetcorn in a towel

While these are things you can try to specifically ease your neck pain, there are many other strategies for coping

with chronic pain.