

# Exercises for a Healthy Neck and Back

## OVERVIEW

Of all the various forms of therapy for neck and back pain, the single best treatment is exercise. Exercise not only restores or maintains muscle strength and flexibility; it helps bring nutrients into the disks themselves. Disks do not contain blood vessels. Rather they receive nutrition through small tunnels within the rubbery disk. Movement of the spine literally pumps nutrients through these channels. Muscle coordination and can also be enhanced by doing cross-laterality exercises, i.e.- using the right leg with the left arm- and vice versa. A good self-directed exercise program is a very effective tool in relieving pain. At Newport Pain Management, we will emphasize the importance of regular exercise. **Record the repetitions and type of exercise you do each in a logbook, and bring it with you to your next appointment.**

## Back Exercise Rules

As with any exercise program, you should follow a few basic principles:

- **Begin slowly.** You cannot undo years of bad posture overnight.
- **Pain = rest.** If you experience pain or other abnormal sensations, stop the activity. Rest a few minutes and restart. Working to the point of severe pain will set you back, especially the next day. The key is to stop as pain develops, rest briefly, and then restart where you left off. This way you are able to make gains, without risking undue pain.
- **Review your form.** Regularly monitor your performance of the exercises to make sure you are doing them correctly. Doing the exercise in front of a mirror allows you to see your own form. When doing strength exercises, muscle failure is the point at which you cannot perform the exercise in perfect technique, and is always the point where you stop.
- **Make your exercises a habit.** Performed on a regular basis, your exercises become part of your daily routine, just like brushing your teeth.
- **Stick with it.** The beneficial effects of exercise are rapidly lost without regular performance of the routine. It is important to continue doing your posture exercises on a regular basis, even when your posture has improved and you are feeling fine.

**WARNING: Before performing any of the following exercises, you should consult with your Doctor. One or more of the following exercises may not be appropriate for your condition or problem, and could cause injury.**

# STRETCHING EXERCISES

Flexibility routines may be performed initially at two repetitions, two to three times a day. Stretches should always be done prior to lifting. Increase by two repetitions each week until a total of twenty repetitions are done. As always, before you start, ask your Newport Pain Management doctor about the right stretches for you.

## Stretching the Neck

Slowly and rhythmically, gently put your neck through its full range of motion. Do not attempt to achieve extremes of movement, and never roll the neck.

**The following neck exercises may be performed sitting or standing; they are most safe when done while your head is supported on a pillow.**

1. Deep breaths. Begin with 3 deep breaths. Take a deep breath in, and exhale as much as possible.
2. Shoulder shrugs. Roll your shoulders back, and then roll them forward..
3. Head bends. Bend head forward and back. Remember, if the back position hurts you, STOP IMMEDIATELY.
4. Head turns. Turn your head, and look over your shoulder.
5. Head tilts. Bring your ear toward your shoulder as far as you can. If it hurts on the same side, however, STOP. If you get a little pain or stretch on the opposite side, that is okay, but do not overdo. It should feel only a little stretched, not painful.
6. Arm clasp reaches. Clasp your hands, and reach over your head as far as you can. Repeat 5 times.
7. Shoulder bone. With your hands at your sides, pull your shoulder blades together in back and tuck in your chin. 9. Arm bone. Place the palms of your hands on the wall or chair in front of you. Lean toward the wall with your body, keeping hands in place. Then push back away from the wall or chair to the starting position (you may need to imagine a wall on this one).
10. Goose neck. Stick your neck out, then pull it way back. The "way back" part is called a chin tuck.
11. Shoulder shrugs. Repeat the shoulder shrugs, backward and forward.
12. Face exercises. First, frown; then, pucker, then smile.
13. Alternate arm reaches. Reach up with your right arm, and then reach up with your left arm. Then reach with your right arm, then your left arm.
14. Bed crunch: Lie flat on your back and hang your head over the edge of the bed as shown. Gradually increase the duration of this stretch, but begin very cautiously.
15. Sideways. Sit or stand with your upper back unsupported, arms beside your body. Raise the right shoulder toward your ear and curve your upper

back, allowing the left shoulder to drop as low as possible. Repeat, raising the opposite shoulder.

16. Backward. Sitting or standing with hands on hips, do the pectoralis stretch by attempting to touch your elbows behind your back.
17. Forward. Interlace your fingers in front of you and push your hands toward the floor, arching your back as you do the rhomboids stretch.

## **Total Back Stretch**

Standing square, lean back as far as you can go; return to the upright position. While still standing, reach upward with one arm extended and the other hand on your hip. Avoid the standing straight-leg toe touch; it increases body tension rather than fully stretching relaxed muscles.

Lying down. Extend your arms above your head; move your upper body to the side; do not bend.

### **Psoas Flexibility**

Lean against a door edge and reach behind you to grasp the door handle for support; extend the hip as far as possible (toes on the ground) and hold this position for a count of ten. When extending one hip, you may find it easier to flex the opposite hip and knee. Repeat five times. Do this exercise at least once a day.

### **Quadriceps Stretch**

Bend your knee and grasp the ankle of that leg behind your body. Standing upright, gently pull your heel until it rests on your buttock. As your heel touches or nears your buttock, do a pelvic tilt. Keep the inner surfaces of your thighs pressed together. Hold for 30 seconds; repeat with the opposite leg.

### **Hamstring Flexibility**

Lying on your back, do single leg lifts with the opposite knee bent. This can be performed as a bent-leg stretch; bend at the hip and pull gently on the calf of the raised bent leg until a mild stretch is felt. In the straight-leg hamstring stretch, the knee is not bent. Hold the leg as high as possible for five seconds; repeat five to ten times per session, and perform the routine at least once each day.

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## **STRENGTHENING EXERCISES**

### **Neck Muscles**

This is a resistance exercise. With the palm of your hand on your forehead, push forward for five seconds; push back against a hand at the back of your head for five seconds; push against interlaced hands placed on the right side of your head; repeat on the left side.

### **Back Muscles**

Work the whole back: The arm and leg lift is performed when lying on your stomach. Lift a leg and arm simultaneously. Always work the opposite leg and arm together in a slow, continuous movement.

Work the Lower back: Lying on your stomach, hold your arms under your chin; lift one leg at a time, raising and lowering it in a slow, continuous movement. Repeat six to eight times for each leg. Rest and repeat.

### **Lower Back Muscles**

The lower back is protected by four major muscle groups: (1) gluteal/buttock, (2) quadriceps/thigh, (3) abdominal/stomach, and (4) paraspinal muscles. If you strengthen these muscles, you will strengthen your lower back.

- **Abdominal muscles.** Lie on your back, flatten your abdomen, and with knees bent, curl up slowly, feeling your upper back peel off the floor. Pull your abdomen in toward the floor, The lower back should remain pressed against the ground. Move your legs as if riding a bicycle. The "crunch," or partial sit-up, held for less than one-minute conditions stomach muscles.
- **Quadriceps group.** Assume the wall slide position -buttocks, back, and shoulders against the wall, feet 12 to 18 inches away; pull in your stomach and slide six to eight inches down the wall; hold for ten seconds (the skier's position). Simultaneously do the pelvic tilt. Repeat ten times; attempt three or more minutes of sustained effort.

- **Gluteal or buttock muscles.** Perform the pelvic tilt, either lying on your back or standing against a wall (1) Standing. Lean your back against a wall with feet 18 inches from the wall. Tilt your pelvis by lifting your pubic bones to the ceiling. Contract your buttocks. Hold for ten seconds; repeat. (2) Lying. Lie on your back and bend your knees. Tighten your stomach muscles and tilt your pelvis to flatten the small of your back, tighten your buttocks. Hold for ten seconds and repeat ten.

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