Musculoskeletal Therapy Services

Neck and Shoulder Pain
Shoulder and neck pain or stiffness is common and usually gets better within a few weeks with good management. Sometimes it can require a little extra help to resolve from a professional like a physiotherapist.

It is possible to experience a combination of neck or shoulder stiffness in isolation or both together. There are many possible causes of neck and/or shoulder pain which are highlighted below.

**WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?**
Neck or shoulder pain can come on suddenly following an activity or incident, or can be a gradual increase over time. Common symptoms may include:

- Reduced movement
- Pain which can range from mild to severe
- Feelings of stiffness, numbness or tingling
- Problems completing tasks which involve movement of the painful area, i.e. driving, overhead tasks
- Sleep disturbance
- Pain which spreads in to the arms or hands

**CAUSES:**

- Over use / Over exertion
- Anxiety
- Ligament injuries
- Trauma
- Muscle strains or sprains
- Degenerative Changes
- Pinched Nerves
- Repetitive tasks in awkward positions
- Stress
- Muscle imbalances
- Poor posture or prolonged position

**TREATMENT AND MANAGEMENT:**

**REMAIN RELATIVELY ACTIVE** - Rest from the activities which worsen your pain where you can, but carry on moving the neck and shoulder gently and frequently. This takes the stress out of the tissues, helping the body to heal quickly.

If you are in the same position or an awkward position for a long time, move regularly to stop your neck and shoulder getting stiff. If you have to continue doing repetitive or heavy activities take lots of regular rests.

**ICE OR HEAT TREATMENTS** - This is good for easing your pain. You can use a cold or hot pack (as you prefer) on the area for 5-10 minutes at a time. This and painkillers will help to keep painful muscle spasm under control.

**PAIN RELIEF** - Simple painkillers such as Paracetamol are safe if you follow the directions on the package. An anti-inflammatory such as Ibuprofen can also provide relief. However, some people are unable to take these due to side effects or other problems. If you are taking other medicines please speak to your pharmacist about what is best to take, as stronger medication can cause a variety of side effects. Taking your medication regularly as it states on the package is important to keep pain under control properly.

**PHYSIOTHERAPY** - A physiotherapist can provide extra help to recover quickly. They will provide advice and exercises designed especially for your situation, and if this fails other treatments such as manipulation, massage and acupuncture maybe useful.

**POSTURE** - Remind yourself to ‘sit up straight’ regularly instead of slouching. Whilst your spine is getting back to normal, keeping it in a good position will really help.

If any of the following symptoms occur you should attend your local Accident and Emergency Department:

- Numbness, pins and needles or tingling in both arms or hands
- Reduced grip strength or ability to hold onto things
- Unsteadiness on your feet

For further reading:
http://cks.nice.org.uk/neck-pain-non-specific#lscenario
http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/shoulderpain/Pages/Introduction.aspx

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