

*e*volution physical therapy

Top 5 *e*xercises to Help Prevent Neck Pain!

Neck pain is all too common these days with extended periods of sitting while working being one of the top culprits. The statistics show that at any given time 10-20% of the population experiences neck pain, and in a given 6 month period up to 54% of people have had an episode of neck pain. Although most acute episodes tend to resolve on their own, over **33%** of people go on to have chronic symptoms or recurrences down the road (1).

In our practice we see both the acute flare ups as well as the people who have gone on to have chronic symptoms or repeated bouts over the years. The good news is that there are things that can be done to improve your pain, and ideally lower your risk of recurrence in the future. Every case is unique, and will often require specific exercises and hands on therapy to address deficits. We decided to put this **e** book together to show you some general stretches and exercises that tend to cover the “big picture” themes that are present in the majority of people coming in for neck related pain.

If we had to sum up one overarching theme to base our exercise selection on, it would have to be the impact that gravity has on our posture/spine and what we can do to move in the opposite direction. Prolonged forward head posture places excess stress on the neck muscles and discs, which often leads to pain. The following exercises all work to improve spinal extension (back bending). As we sit, gravity tends to pull us into a slumped position (flexion) with a forward head and rounded shoulders. Independent of neck pain, these exercises should be on most everyone's list of daily “hygiene” exercises to keep their body in ship shape, and prevent issues down the road.

As a word of caution, if you are experiencing neck pain or radiating arm pain it is always best to consult a licensed healthcare professional for a thorough evaluation to properly diagnose and treat your issue. This **e** book is for educational purposes only, and not meant to be a substitute for a formal evaluation.

Below is a list of exercises that we use often, and see great results with. There are a few exercises that work on joint mobility and range of motion, and two great exercises for strengthening postural muscles. The mobility exercises I would perform daily, while the strengthening exercises I would perform 3 times per week.

Quadruped Thoracic Rotation:

Goal: Improve middle and upper back rotation and extension mobility to allow for more upright posture

Description of exercise: Starting on hands and knees. Place the back of your right hand on your forehead, then slowly raise your right elbow to the ceiling allowing your trunk to rotate to the right. Return to the starting position, then repeat for 10 repetitions total. Perform on both sides.



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Pectoral Stretch in Doorway:

Goal: To improve chest flexibility to allow shoulders and spine to roll back into a more upright position.

Description of exercise: Standing in doorway, place inside of forearms along doorframe with elbows at about shoulder height. Slowly step/shift through the doorway to feel stretch in your chest. Hold for 30 seconds, rest, and repeat two more times.



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Cervical Retraction (chin tuck):

Goal: To stretch to neck into extension to alleviate stress on the discs caused by prolonged forward head position

Description of exercise: Seated in chair without using back support while maintaining upright posture, slowly pull head back while keeping eyes level. I will often cue people to pretend you are trying to move away from a “close talker.” Pull your head back until you feel a gentle stretch, then release back to neutral position. Repeated 5-10 times. Perform a few times per day.



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Y's:

Goal: Improve lower trap muscle strength which helps to tip shoulder blade back into and more neutral position for better posture.

Description of exercise: Lying on edge of bed or ottoman with edge of bed at level of your armpits and arms hanging over the edge. Begin movement by first lifting chest off of the bed to avoid rounding forward, then slowly raise both arms up to make a “Y” with your body. Lower arms and repeat for a total of 10 repetitions. Perform 2-3 sets.



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Bilateral shoulder external rotation:

Goal: To improve middle and lower trapezius strength for improve shoulder blade position and posture.

Description of exercise: Standing with elbows tucked at side and palms facing one another, slowly pull hands apart while keeping elbow/upper arm at your side. Slowly return to the starting position, then repeat for a total of 10 repetitions. Perform 2-3 sets.

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If you or someone you know is struggling with neck pain, whether acute or chronic we would love to help out!

We offer both virtual appointments and in office physical therapy to help meet your needs.

If you are on the fence, or are just looking for more information we also offer a FREE 30-minute discovery visit either in person or virtually to discuss your case and goals.

You can give us a call in the office at 475-209-9420 or reply directly to the email that the *e* book came in.

References:

1. Cohen SP, Hooten WM. Advances in the diagnosis and management of neck pain. BMJ. 2017 Aug 14;358:j3221.