

#1 Stretch and Exercise Program for Neck Pain, Pinched Nerve, etc.

Most of the information in this video is based on information provided by the McKenzie approach to treating neck pain. Robin McKenzie's book *Treat Your Own Neck* is a terrific resource.

Ideally these exercises should be performed in a solid backed chair (with the top of the backrest reaching to mid-shoulder blade or so). It is especially important for you to gauge whether the exercises are working.

Generally, as neck pain or a neck pinched nerve worsens, the further down the neck and body (upper back/arms) the symptoms of pain, numbness, tingling, weakness, and/or burning may occur. So, we would like to see the opposite. We would like to see your symptoms improve in an ascending fashion. This is what McKenzie refers to as centralization. The pain becomes progressively smaller and more focused in the neck. That is less pain, numbness, tingling, weakness and/or burning in the hand or arm. This can help you gauge whether your self-treatments are helping.

We will start by having you perform a warmup exercise- a seated chin tuck. Place your head and neck in the best posture you can obtain. Tuck your chin in and feel a stretch in the area where your skull meets your neck. When you tuck your chin your eyes and head should remain level- you should neither look down nor up. Perform 5-10X.



If performing a chin tuck exercise while seated increases your pain levels, try lying on your back flat on the floor with a rolled towel under your head. In this position attempt the chin tuck and gauge your pain response.



Once the neck is warmed up. You will begin exercise number one.

Exercise 1

With your head, neck, and body in the best posture attainable perform a chin tuck and then work on extending the neck back. Then return your head to upright. Start with small motions and gauge your pain. If it remains the same or even narrows a bit, continue with the exercise. Perform 5 to 10 x. After you finish the pain should still be the same or better. If that is the case, you will perform this simple exercise 6 to 8x per day. We know that is a lot, but the exercise only takes a few minutes.



If while performing the exercise the pain worsens and starts to spread out, stop the exercise and try the next step instead.

Exercise 1A

You are going to use a towel to provide some support to your neck while performing the exercises. The towel can be held in place with different options. See which option works for you. Generally, I first have the patient place the towel around the back of their neck and grab the ends with one hand (of the nonpainful arm or side). Pull down on both ends simultaneously to provide support to the neck. With the towel in place attempt the same exercise: Chin tuck and neck extension. For most people this provides some relief, and they can perform the exercise. Extend the neck only as far as pain allows. Repeat up to 10x and gauge

your pain. If your pain is better or the same, gradually increase until performing the exercise 6-8x per day (10 repetitions each time).

Exercise 1B

If the pain is worse with the towel, try placing the towel this way instead. Place the “selvage” (tightly woven edge of the towel) against your neck at about mid-neck. Grab the ends of the towel with one hand (of the nonpainful arm or side), or with both hands. Pull out and slightly up on the towel (approx. 45-degree angle). The towel ends should be near your eyes. Pull out and slightly up on both ends simultaneously to provide support to the neck. With the towel in place attempt the same exercise: Chin tuck and neck extension. As you extend your head and neck, your hands and towel should follow along. The ends of the towel should always be near your eyes. Hopefully, this stretch provides some relief, and you can perform the exercise. Extend the neck only as far as pain allows. Repeat up to 10x and gauge your pain. If your pain is better or the same, gradually increase until performing the exercise 6-8x per day (10 repetitions each time).

Exercise 1C

Eventually the goal is for you to progress and perform the exercise without a towel. Once able to perform without a towel your goal is to extend the head and neck back further and further as pain allows. Eventually after you had extended the head and neck as far as it goes, you will want to try rotating your head and neck back and forth while simultaneously trying to move your head and neck back further. The rotation of the neck should be minor (rotate your nose only one inch in each direction). Continue to monitor your pain response to the rotation. If it worsens, perform Exercise 1C without the rotation at the end. Try the rotation again in a few sessions. If Exercises 1 to 1C make your pain worse, or if your progress get stalled, try Exercise 2.

Exercise 2

Sit with good posture in a straight-backed chair. Perform a chin tuck and try side-bending your head toward the predominant side of your pain in your neck, arm, etcetera. If your pain is mostly right sided, perform the chin tuck and then

bend your head and neck toward your right shoulder. Then return your head to upright.

Start with small motions and gauge your pain. If your pain remains the same or even narrows a bit, continue with the exercise. Perform 5 to 10 x. Work to bend the neck further and further. To assist with the stretch, use your hand on the same side of the pain to GENTLY stretch the neck. Use just the fingertips of the hand to ensure that you do not stretch too aggressively. After you finish your pain should still be the same or better. If that is the case, you will perform this simple exercise 6 to 8x per day. We know that is a lot of repetitions per day, but the exercise only takes a few minutes.