

Top 2 Exercises for Neck Pain Caused/Worsened by Turning Your Head

If your neck pain increases with turning your head, we have three stretches for you to try. When doing a stretch, it is important for you to gauge whether it is beneficial for decreasing your pain.

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-stretches are helping.

1. Rotations with stretch

Put yourself in the best upright posture possible. Sitting in a chair with a firm upright back is preferred. 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 5X.

Perform another chin tuck and from that position turn your head to the right and then to the left. If it is more painful to one side- try performing repeated rotations to the painful side. If the pain begins to diminish or centralize you will continue this specific exercise for 5-10 repetitions (6-8x per days-spread out). If the pain worsens, work instead on rotating in the opposite direction to the non-painful side. Continue to rotate to the nonpainful side for 5-10 repetitions (6-8x per days-spread out). Occasionally try rotating into the painful direction to determine if there has been improvement in pain levels. Eventually the goal is to return working back into the painful direction if pain begins to improve.

2. Rotations with a towel

Place the “selvage” (tightly woven edge of the towel) against your neck at the position where the neck meets the skull (about C1). Grab the two ends of the towel with your hands. You will be working on rotating into the restricted or painful direction.

Rotating to the right. After you grab the two ends of your towel, your hands will switch with each other. After switching, your left hand should pull straight down on its towel end. The right hand will pull the opposite towel end across the left side of your face up near your eyes. This movement should be pain-free, or do not continue. If pain-free, perform the rotation toward the painful side in 5-10 repetitions. Repeat 6-8 times spread out through the day. Do not let the left shoulder move forward during the rotation.

Rotating to the left. After you grab the two ends of your towel, your hands will switch with each other. After switching, your right hand should pull straight down on its towel end. The left hand will pull the opposite towel end across the left side of your face up near your eyes. This movement should be pain-free, or do not continue. If pain-free, perform the rotation toward the painful side in 5-10 repetitions. Repeat 6-8 times spread out through the day. Do not let the right shoulder move forward during the rotation.