



obermeyermd.com

O: 847-285-4318

F: 847-885-0130

Self-Directed Home Exercise Program Referred Pain – Neck Strengthening

Introduction: Some pain experienced in the arm may have a source outside the arm. You have been identified as having a likely source of pain emanating from a higher location in the body, specifically a nerve that takes course from the cervical spine. These exercises can improve resistance to loads on your neck and can improve tolerance of nerve problems. As you strengthen your neck over several weeks, the pain in your arm is expected to dissipate.

Instructions: This program has two sections, first some postural modifications that may release some of the tension on the nerves and muscles, and then a stretching/strengthening regimen. You might consider some of the postural modifications for sitting and for sleeping if you have pain with these activities. If pain is controlled with oral medications, you can progress to stretching/strengthening for daily sessions of 20-30 minutes each.



(Posture) Sitting Arm Support:

If you have heaviness or pain in your arm or shoulder blade at rest or when working at a desk or computer, try placing your affected arm on a pillow or support to take the pull of gravity away from your arm.



(Posture) Back Support:

Sitting in a low, soft chair with the back curled forward may place more tension in the nerves and muscles. Try sitting in a harder chair with a lumbar support or pillow to keep the back arched. Place a pillow or support in the lap to take the tension off the arm.

(Posture) Sleeping Support: If you have pain in your arm at night, try lying on your unaffected side and place your affected arm on a pillow or two so that your arm is at the level of your head. The number of pillows can be adjusted to a position of comfort.





Thomas Obermeyer, M.D.



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(Strengthening) Isometric Neck Extensions: Lie on your back with your neck fully supported, with one or two pillows, and the neck slightly tipped forward (flexed) and a pillow under your knees. Gently push the middle of the back of your head against the bed/floor. You should feel tension in your neck muscles. Your head position should not move. Hold 5 seconds and relax. Repeat 10 times.

(Strengthening) Resisted Neck Flexion: Lie on your back with your neck fully supported, with one or two pillows, and the neck slightly tipped forward (flexed) and a pillow under your knees. Place both hands on your chin and try to nod your head while resisting the movement with your hands. Your head position should not move. Hold 5 seconds and relax. Repeat 10 times.



(Strengthening) Resisted Neck Rotation: Lie on your back with your neck fully supported, with one or two pillows, and the neck slightly tipped forward (flexed) and a pillow under your knees. Place your hand on the side of your head (pictured to left as viewed from above) and try to turn your head to your side as you resist with your hand. Your head position should not move. Hold 5 seconds and relax. Repeat 10 times.



(Strengthening) Shoulder Blade Exercises: In the sitting position, gently move your shoulder blades back and up in small movements. Hold 5 seconds and relax. Repeat 10 times.



(Strengthening) Grip: In the sitting position, hold a soft ball while supporting your forearm on a table. Push your thumb and index finger together. Hold 5 seconds and relax. Repeat 10 times.



(Strengthening) Shoulder Girdle Exercises: In sitting or standing position, lift your shoulders straight to the ceiling and hold 5 seconds prior to relaxing. Try this while keeping your hands on your waist or holding 1 lb to 5 lb weights. Repeat 10 times.



(Stretching) Upper Trapezius: In sitting position, tilt your head toward one shoulder until you feel the stretch on the opposite side. Using your hand, gently pull your head further to the side. Hold stretch for 10 seconds and relax. Repeat 5 times on each side.

(Stretching) Scalenes: While sitting on a chair, hold the bottom of the chair as shown. Lean your head and arm away from the fixed arm. Hold stretch for 10 seconds and relax. Repeat 5 times on each side.





(Stretching) Rotation: While sitting, turn your head to the side until you feel a stretch. Using your hand, gently push your head further around. Hold stretch for 10 seconds and relax. Repeat 5 times on each side.



(Stretching) Wall Press-Ups: Stand facing a wall with your arms straight and hands on the wall. Do push-ups against the wall keeping your body in a straight line. Focus on the stretch at the end of the contraction (shown) and try holding 5 seconds. Perform 10 repetitions.



(Strengthening) Overhead Presses: Sit or stand holding 1 lb to 5 lb weights. While alternating arms, lift the weights from your chest straight up and bring back down. Keep your torso straight and do not lean. Repeat 10 times on each side.

(Stretching) Cat Cows: Get on the floor or mat on all fours. Slowly arch your back while looking at the floor as shown and gradually lift your head to look ahead of you. Hold 5 seconds. Slowly return to starting position. Repeat 10 times.

