

Tips, Strategies and News You Can Use To Achieve Optimum Health...For Life!

Feb 2007 Issue

Could It Be More Than A "Crick" In The Neck?

Peggy is a 50-year-old active female who is in relatively good shape. She exercises regularly, isn't overweight and eats right. But one day while replacing an overhead light bulb, a sharp pain shot through the left side of Peggy's neck.

But the pain didn't last long, so Peggy wasn't **overly** concerned. Within a few hours, however, the pain was back. And this time it was worse than before. Peggy felt her neck muscles cramp, stiffen and tighten. Peggy got on the phone right away with her doctor and scheduled an appointment.

At the clinic, Peggy's doctor revealed that she had a classic case of "cervical pain". He added that, no, she did not require surgery - the good news was that neck pain such as this responds well to physical

therapy. Her doctor then referred her to our clinic. Peggy wanted to know more about "cervical pain".

What is Cervical Pain?

The cervical spine is located in your neck and supports your head. This structure is both complex and extremely mobile at the same time. It supports a head which weighs as much as a large bowling ball (15 lbs. or more) and allows freedom of movement (90 degrees or more) in each direction. The cervical spine includes...

- Seven small **bones** (called vertebrae),
- **Discs** between the vertebrae which provide cushioning,
- Several **joints** which provide stability and mobility,
- Eight **nerve roots** which send signals to the brain, shoulders, arms and chest,
- **Arteries** and **veins** which carry blood to and from the heart,



Robert Inglis, MPT, CSCS

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- More than 30 **muscles**,
- Tendons and ligaments which create strength in the structure,
- And finally, the spinal cord itself.

Because of this amazing complexity, the cervical spine is prone to both **pain** and **injury**. In our clinic, we see many different causes for neck pain. Here are the top ones we see:

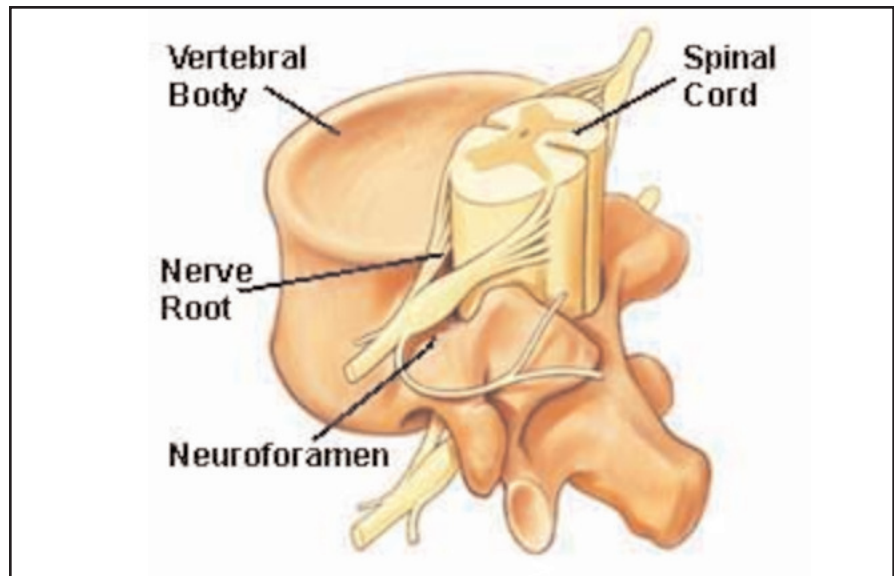
Injury and Accidents

If you've ever seen someone in a neck brace (cervical collar), many times it's the result of an injury called "whiplash". A genuine injury, whiplash normally occurs as the result of auto accidents. Here's how: Whiplash injury occurs when the head moves either backwards or forwards in a **traumatic** and **violent fashion**. When the head is pushed beyond its normal range of motion in this way, the **muscles** and **ligaments** in the neck are over-stretched and strained, resulting in "micro-tears", stiffness and pain.

The Aging Process

Age-associated disorders can also cause neck pain. Some of these include:

- **Osteoarthritis** - This is a gradual deterioration of joint cartilage. Normally seen in the hands and feet, osteoarthritis can also occur in the neck, causing pain and loss of mobility.
- **Spinal Stenosis** - Pinched and trapped nerve roots. Stenosis occurs when the "foramen" (small openings for nerves) are squeezed. This "pinching" can cause neck, shoulder and arm pain. Numbness can also be a symptom of stenosis.



- **Degenerative Disc Disease (DDD)** - DDD occurs when the discs between the bones of the neck (vertebrae) lose water, cushioning and elasticity, resulting in a "drying out" or shrinking of the discs. This can cause severe pain and loss of movement. In the extreme, discs can even bulge or burst. You can imagine how painful this is! Tingling and numbness also result from herniated or bulging discs.

Everyday Wear and Tear

Everyday wear and tear can also cause neck pain. Some of the factors which cause wear and tear on the neck include:

- **Stress** - causes the neck muscles to become stiff and rigid, which results in pain, numbness and tingling.
- **Lack of exercise and /or obesity** - Obesity is a contributing factor to many bone and skeletal-related disorders. It should be no surprise that **obesity** and **lack of exercise** is a factor in neck pain, too. Why? Because excessive

weight of the arms, chest and shoulders increases strain on the neck.

- **Poor posture** - Improper posture changes the normal curvature of the spine, which can result in neck pain.

Trauma

I discussed whiplash a moment ago. Other types of trauma can also cause neck pain, too. Falls, skiing accidents and diving accidents can cause **serious** neck trauma. These types of accidents result in pain due to *compression of the spinal cord itself* or fractures of the vertebrae. Tumors and **infections** of the spine can also cause neck pain. If your pain is excessive or is ongoing, be sure to see your doctor.

Diagnosis

Remember: Pain is your body's signal that something is wrong. So if you have any type of pain (including neck pain) the first step is always to get it checked out. When you *do* see your doctor, he or she will take a look at your medical

history and probe with questions such as:

- 1.) "What prompted the pain?"
- 2.) "How long have you experienced this pain?"
- 3.) "Is the pain localized in one area...or does it extend into other areas of the body?"
- 4.) "What makes the pain worse?"

Then your doctor will evaluate your posture, your neck's range of motion and your overall physical state. If a particular movement does cause pain, it's recorded. During the exam, your doctor may also feel the curvature of your spine, neck and look for muscle spasms. He or she may also conduct a neurological exam which may include testing your reflexes, pain severity tests, motor ability and muscle strength evaluations.

Sometimes, **X-Rays** can be helpful. They can reveal underlying issues such as the presence of **bone spurs**, fractures, the constriction of space between vertebrae (Stenosis), and other physical abnormalities, such as osteoarthritis. To see "inside" your body and view soft tissue, and MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) may also be ordered. MRI's are used to detect the presence of herniated or bulged discs. Other more specialized neurological tests may also be performed.

Treatment

While all that may seem complex, the **good news is that neck strain responds to conservative treatment**. That means surgery is

not normally needed and **more conservative treatments can reverse and/or eliminate neck pain**.

This is where physical therapy comes in. One of the biggest advantages is that physical therapy is a proven way to treat neck pain *without* surgery. Your physical therapist can relieve pressure and control muscle spasms, decreasing the pain you experience. He or she may also employ the following treatments:

1.) Cervical Collars - Cervical collars reduce the pressure on the neck and restrict the neck's movement, providing relief. Typically, we'll use cervical collars only in the **initial** stages of recovery.

2.) Traction - Traction creates a subtle pulling motion. This stretches the neck muscles and **decompresses** pinched discs and nerves by increasing the openings (foramen), resulting in decreased pain.

3.) NSAID's - This stands for "non-steroidal, anti-inflammatory" drugs. These drugs provide relief by reducing inflammation. Also, muscle relaxants and other painkillers may be prescribed.

4.) General Physical Therapy - Heat, cold, ultrasound and massage help to soothe and relax sore muscles. This, in turn, can reduce the pain and inflammation, leading to pain reduction. Your physical therapist may also educate you on relaxation, proper body mechanics and teach you exercises to build your neck strength.

Surgery

Unfortunately, in some rare cases, surgery is ultimately needed. This is true if a patient's pain does **not** respond to more conservative treatments such as physical therapy, if the pain is experienced for a long period of time or if the neck is exceedingly weak. Surgery, however, is always the last resort.

Also, advanced spinal stenosis, a fractured vertebrae or a ruptured vertebral disc are some situations where surgery may be the best course of treatment.

As I said a moment ago, the vast majority of patients with neck pain do NOT require surgery. More conservative treatments such as physical therapy must first be exhausted before a patient moves onto neck surgery.

Recovery

To correct neck pain, two factors must be present: professional medical attention and time.

With that in mind, it's best to focus on **preventing** neck pain before it strikes. As the old saying goes, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure". Strive to protect your neck by exercising regularly, stretching properly, maintaining good posture and losing weight. And if you do experience neck pain, be sure to call your physical therapist or doctor right away.

-- Robert Inglis, MPT, CSCS

Your 12-Month Plan For Making This The Healthiest Year Ever!

Do you remember the movie “Contact”? At the end of the movie Jodie Foster’s character meets a space alien on another planet. Amazed, she asks this advanced creature how we humans can change our destructive habits. The alien’s reply? “Small steps, Ellie...small steps”.

Question: How do you eat an elephant?

Answer: One bite at a time.

We live in a microwave culture. We all want a “magic pill” or “instant solution” to our problems. But in the real world, that doesn’t exist. **Change is incremental.** Consistency and routine are the cornerstones of healthy living and “small steps” are the secret to lasting, permanent change. Following this principle of “small steps”, YOU can make 2007 the healthiest year of your life!

I’m going to show you how to do that, month by month, in this special series of articles. No matter how daunting the health challenge may be for you, there is good news. Namely, that you have an **entire 12 months to initiate positive changes** and develop new, healthy habits!



Sieze The Day

“Take things one month at a time. And make the right choices on a daily basis”, says Brian Sutton, personal trainer at Physical Therapy Specialists. “Those monthly habits and daily choices add up to powerful long-term results . One of the biggest mistakes I see is when people expect too much of themselves too soon. Instead, I suggest they focus only on the month at hand”.

That’s good advice. You see, your bad habits didn’t happen over night. They took time to develop. The same is true of positive habits: they take time to develop. Experts agree it takes at least 21 days or repetitions for any routine activity to become firmly entrenched as a “habit”.

“Don’t try to overhaul your entire life in one sweeping move”, says Sutton. “If you’re overweight or out of shape, realize the key to success is developing life long habits of diet and exercise. Exercise regularly, eat right and the weight loss will take care of itself. Fat loss is a **by-product of a healthy lifestyle**. So, focus on one simple lifestyle change this month and you’ll be one step closer to your long-term goal. Then at the end of the year, you’ll have 12 new healthy habits . You’ll look back and be amazed! This will motivate you more than ever!”

Small Step Month One - Develop Positive Eating And Exercise Habits

Small Step: This month, we’re only going to focus on developing one on developing ONE muscle. And that’s the “positive habit” muscle. You see, before you start an exercise and eating program, you first need to **fit that time into your life**.

So to start, I’d like you to write down your eating and exercise goals. And make sure those goals are specific. For your eating plan, focus on one week at a time . Your

exercise plan can be scheduled for the entire month.

Sutton shares the following tip: “Your fitness goal for the month can be as simple as taking your dog on a 15-minute walk each day. At this stage, the **duration is not important**. Instead, it’s the act of developing the habit of daily exercise and fitting it in your routine that’s important”.

Plan All Of Your Meals

Last month’s issue of *YourHealthToday* emphasized the **importance of planning meals**. Sutton says a **weekly meal plan** is a very healthy habit to get in place.

It’s dangerous to let the “whim of the moment” or “convenience” dictate your diet. Instead, plan each meal - including snacks - in advance. Then select a “supermarket day” (Sundays are best) and do all your grocery shopping for the week on that one day. Not only does that save you time (and gas!), but by limiting your grocery shopping to just one day, it forces you to be **conscious** about your eating and plan your meals. You have to think about what you’re putting in your mouth. That way, you won’t succumb to the temptations of fast food or “convenient” junk food.

As far as your exercise routine, schedule a time to exercise **each and every day**. Studies show it’s actually easier to establish a daily habit than one every few days. That’s because it’s more consistent than skipping days. Then, if you miss a day, you’re only **one day away** from your next workout. No big deal. And after 21 days of following this routine... “presto!” ...it will be a positive habit and a regular part of your life. You’ve made a very important contribution to your own health.

Your Commitment Is The First Step

Again: at this stage **do NOT worry about the duration or intensity of your exercise**. That’s not the point. Instead, focus on getting “the exercise habit” firmly entrenched in your life. For example, if you don’t feel like exercising one day, still honor that time commitment. Put on your workout clothes and stretch instead. Honor that time. The act of committing to your exercise time is the important thing at this point.



Another tip Sutton shares is that **you shouldn’t set your fitness expectations too high**. This is especially true when it comes to fat loss. “Most people think they can lose 10 pounds per week”, says Sutton. “Unless you’re walking 25 miles a day, it’s *almost impossible*. If you’re looking to lose fat and retain muscle mass, focus on losing one or two pounds of fat per week. That’s good, solid fat loss and a realistic goal.”

Don’t set your goals out of reach. If you do, you may become impatient, get frustrated with your “slow” progress and quit. **Remember that it took a long time for you to become out of shape**. If you’re overweight, you’re reversing literally *years* of bad habits. So the secret is to focus on consistency and routine.

Summary

Write down your eating and fitness goals. Block out a time each day to exercise. Get in the habit of planning your meals and exercising.

Next month: In the March issue of *YourHealthToday*, I’m going to reveal a simple “heart healthy” cooking tip that may just save your life! And as always: send me an email to let me know about small steps that have produced big results for you!

You can reach me at: mycorept@yahoo.com

“Ask The Expert”

Your Questions and Answers



Question: “Can you really change your metabolism?”

A 40-year-old female patient came to me stressed over her inability to lose weight. As a busy law student, she ate on the run, often skipping meals. She wasn't losing weight on 1,200 calories a day. She envied her husband's ability to shed weight more easily.

Another frustrated client found himself 40 pounds overweight after having knee surgery. After getting back into body building and working out, he was having trouble controlling his appetite. "I am eating more than before", he asked. "What do I do?"

Like many of you, these dieters were ignoring a key factor in managing weight: **metabolism**. Your metabolism - the amount of energy your body uses each day - can determine whether you will be successful in losing weight and keeping it off. Controlling your weight is easier if your metabolism is faster. So, the question remains: Is it possible to speed up your metabolism?

The answer is “yes”. Although your metabolism is usually fairly stable, there are several things you can do to help **rev** it up.

Exercise is No. 1 - Working out builds muscle. Muscle speeds metabolism. As the body works more efficiently, it processes food faster and your appetite increases. This is why my client who had

been body building was having trouble controlling his hunger. Men, being the more muscular sex, generally burn more calories than a woman of the same weight. This is why the law student was having a harder time losing weight than her husband.

Don't Skip Meals

Space meals 3-4 hours apart. That way you have enough energy throughout the day and you'll be free of the headaches, hunger pangs or mood swings you get when you're famished. **Eating erratically signals the body to burn slower and conserve fat.** This is why the law student who has been skipping meals is not losing weight on 1,200 calories. She would be better off having smaller, balanced meals and snacks throughout the day.

The way to lose more fat than muscle is to **follow a balanced nutrition and exercise plan** which promotes an average weight loss rate of 1-2 pounds per week.

Food Affects Mood

What you eat influences your metabolism and mood, making you either sluggish or energetic. Foods high in sugar, saturated fats, artificial sweeteners and low in water and fiber will slow digestion, can cause weight gain and leave you feeling like a couch potato.

Whole grains, vegetables, fruits, beans and legumes, fresh herbs and spices provide the proteins, carbohydrates and fats that give you energy and

level your blood sugar levels. Healthy fats (olive oil, avocado, fish oils, seeds, nuts, soybeans) promote longer-lasting, stable energy levels. Lean proteins (fish, soy foods, white meat poultry, lean meats and low-fat dairy) offer essential proteins for better digestion and muscle building.

Drink lots of water. By drinking eight glasses of water each day, you will have better digestion (better emptying of the stomach and intestines, less gas, bloating, constipation) and a flatter tummy. Staying hydrated also reduces headaches and fights fatigue.

You should also get pleasure from eating. Even if adding a piece of dark chocolate is your wish, go for it, one square at a time, as it aids in happy brain chemistry and adds a natural bitter which aids digestion. Improving digestion this way also strengthens the liver, kidneys and lungs, all which facilitate a healthier metabolism.

Stay Cool - Colder weather increases metabolism in order to keep the body



warm, although it can be a challenge to maintain your weight during the holidays and colder months when exercise levels tend to drop and pounds often pile on. By keeping indoor temperatures cooler and exercising outdoors, you can burn more calories.

As your metabolism increases, you'll feel more energetic, lighter - and hungrier. But don't worry. As digestion improves, the stomach empties more regularly and you feel thinner in the waistline and less full in the chest. People who have a faster metabolism have fewer food cravings and feel more in control of their eating.

Don't Get Stuck In A Rut

Some dieters get stuck at a certain weight. To keep your weight from

plateauing, you must make small changes to keep your body from adapting to a routine of eating the same amount of calories.

If you can't lose those last five pounds, add a couple hundred calories more a day for two weeks and then return to a lesser amount. Over time this strategy will allow you to increase the amount of calories you can eat and continue to lose weight.

Be Patient

It may take you some time to increase your metabolism - three months is a reasonable timeframe to expect to see changes. If you are having a hard time losing weight, you might consider having your metabolism tested by a professional nutritionist.

The key is to be persistent, have confidence and be patient.

Soon you will feel healthier and stronger, and in time you will see the results of a toned, healthier body. Best of all, you will have a clearer understanding of what makes your body feel and work better, so you will be able to more effectively control your weight for years to come.

Both my law student and body builder clients achieved results this way.

A regular routine of having easy meals and snacks on hand and spreading her calorie intake throughout the day gave the lawyer-to-be increased, longer-lasting energy levels.

And the body builder lost weight by eating more regular, balanced meals and including more whole grain, fruits, vegetables and healthy fats into his snacking routine.

Health Trivia - Test Your Health And Fitness Knowledge!

This month's quiz is full of questions from the main article on *Is It More Than A Crick In The Neck?*. See how many of these you can get right...**and no peeking!** Good luck!

QUESTION #1: How many muscles are in your neck?

- a.) 7
- b.) 9
- c.) 13
- d.) More than 30

QUESTION #2: True or False: "Whiplash is an imaginary injury made up by ambulance-chasing attorneys".

- a.) TRUE
- b.) FALSE

QUESTION #3: Which of the following can contribute to neck pain?

- a.) Spinal Stenosis
- b.) Accidents
- c.) Osteoarthritis

- d.) Obesity and lack of exercise
- e.) All of the above

QUESTION #4: True or False: "Pain is normal. You should not be unduly worried when you experience neck pain."

- a.) TRUE
- b.) FALSE

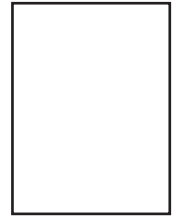
QUESTION #5: True or False: "Surgery is the only option for most cases of neck pain."

- a.) TRUE
- b.) FALSE

Answers:

1) d 2) b 3) e 4) b 5) b

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“Here’s How To Stick To Your New Year’s Resolution! Let Us Help You!”

If you made a New Year’s Resolution to “finally get into shape”, but don’t know where to start, you’re **not alone!** Many people have the **desire** and **motivation** to get into shape, but **lack the knowledge**. They don’t know what exercises to do, how to do them and how to avoid injury. This can be frustrating and stand in the way of getting in shape. **And we don’t want that to happen!** This is where Physical Therapy Specialists comes in. You see, our resident personal trainer, Brian, has designed a “get in shape” program *just for you!* Whether you’re getting back into shape after a long layoff, or are starting fresh, this program is designed for people just like you. Brian is exceedingly

patient and won’t push you harder than you can handle. He understands where you are right now and will take you through the program at your pace: one step at a time. Consistency is the key to long-term weight loss, cardiovascular conditioning, flexibility and strength. You’ll never believe how much energy you’ll have...and how great you feel after starting Brian’s program! So don’t be afraid: Reach out and give us a call **right now**. Ask Brian about his special program today and get a FREE session with a true fitness PRO! Call NOW!

(714) 528-9400