

Cervical Strain

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There are probably few injuries as difficult to manage, and see a successful and complete recovery in, than those injuries involving the neck or cervical spine. Damage to a muscle or tendon in the neck and shoulder area is classified as a cervical strain. The most common cause of the cervical strain injury includes overuse, overstretching, car accidents, contraction against resistance or a direct blow to the neck/shoulder region - activities frequently experienced in many contact sports. The majority of muscle injuries in the neck are complicated by or occur along with joint injuries.

The cervical muscle strain injury is complex, due to the many layers of muscles in the neck, each having multiple attachments. One muscle commonly strained is the trapezius. It is a superficial muscle that lies over the back of the neck, top of the shoulders and upper back. The trapezius is particularly susceptible to strain when exposed to cold, windy weather. Muscles in the front of the neck can be injured if the head is driven backward or forcefully turned to the side. This injury may produce pain with rotating and flexing the neck, making the neck more comfortable when it is bent and rested more to one side. Injury to deeper cervical muscles produce deep pain or soreness, especially with backward movement.

Treatment and management of cervical strain injuries is very important. Inadequate or improper treatment will undoubtedly lead to complications and chronic pain. Early treatment should include ice, rest and support for the first couple of days after the injury. When acute symptoms subside, in four to five days, heat and gentle massage may be used to remove soreness and to produce continued healing. This should be followed by gentle stretching as movement once again becomes pain free.

Because there is potential for more serious injury including the common involvement of spinal joint injury accompanying cervical strain, it makes good sense to consult a spinal care specialist, such as a chiropractic doctor, following any neck injury, to rule out joint injury and to insure complete healing and return to activity.

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