

Top 10 Most Burning Questions and Answers for Neck/Arm Pain and Headaches

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The Neck Pain and Headache Specialists

1. Q: How long is this going to take to go away?

A: It depends...it depends on YOU.

In general, it takes to 4 to 8 weeks to go through the first 2 phases of healing (no pain, all movement back to normal).

It may take another 1 to 4 months to get back to all your strength back, and another period of time to return to high level activities...depending on how active you are. These are the third and fourth phase of healing.

Here are 10 variables that determine how fast someone can heal:

- ✓ Overall health. Healthy fit people heal faster. Younger people heal faster.
- ✓ Other health issues such as diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, tobacco use, alcohol abuse and body weight all influence healing rates...and make the time to heal longer.
- ✓ Diet. People who consume more nutrients in their calories (Dr. Joel Fuhrman calls this "Nutrarian") heal faster than those who primarily eat processed foods.
- ✓ Rest levels. Our bodies need sleep and rest to rebuild. A lack of sleep slows healing time.
- ✓ Stress levels. People who have high levels of stress heal more slowly. This is especially true for neck pain and headache sufferers.
- ✓ Sedentary lifestyle. People who sit all day for work or to watch TV heal more slowly. Seated work is especially difficult for neck pain and headache sufferers.
- ✓ People who follow advice and instruction from top-level healthcare professionals heal more quickly than those who do not follow-through with care.
- ✓ People who are highly aware of their daily postures and habits heal more quickly...because they can adjust habits such as sleep or sitting positions more quickly.
- ✓ Readers heal more quickly. People with higher attention spans are more likely to be self-educated on a topic and more likely to follow-through with successful treatment.
- ✓ People who think there's hope tend to be more persistent and won't let anything stop them. (Recently we had a man with spinal pain fly from Hawaii to California to be successfully treated for spinal pain).

2. Q: How long before I see improvements? Can I be completely healed or will this come back again?

A: Most people we see in the clinic feel better in 1 to 3 visits...or within 1 to 2 weeks. If you go longer than 2 weeks without feeling any relief or moving better...you may be wrong about the cause of your neck pain or headache, regardless of what your X-ray or MRI shows.

Most people we see who complete the 4 Phases of Healing (meaning they no longer have pain, they have full mobility and strength, and they're back to doing all the activities they want to do without pain)...they have a minimal chance the pain will return.

The stronger the person is...the less likely the painful symptoms will come back.

Your body is a bit like a car. If you take care of it, regularly change the oil and keep it running and fine tuned...little chance of break down.

If you ignore it...very likely to break down and be in need of repair.

3. Q: Do I need any special equipment?

A: At Excel PT, we use a minimalist approach...We don't use big, fancy, expensive equipment...

There are some exceptions, including traction and laser. There is a machine (Saunders Cervical Home Traction unit), which we find very effective for home use...for people who show signs their neck pain may be relieved with traction.

Otherwise, most exercises can be done with an exercise band, a mobilization wedge, and a safe place to exercise.

Our model focuses on world-class hands-on Physical Therapist, a table and some basic exercise equipment you can do at home or on the road if traveling.

This works best for most people.

4. Q: Should I use heat or ice on my head and neck?

A: The cause of most neck, arm and headache problems (pain, numbness or tingling in the head or arm) is in the neck.

Consider that headache or arm pain is "inflammation" on the nerve. Sometimes heat can increase that inflammation.

So if you're inflamed...do you want to put heat on it and make it more inflamed?

Or ice to calm the inflammation down.

We have seen some people use ice on the neck to calm down the inflammation temporarily.

5. Q: Which exercises should I do?

A: The best exercises for you depend on what the cause of your neck pain or headache is.

We will cover the 3 most common causes...

Herniated discs

Stenosis, arthritis

Thoracic spine problems

Each has a series of gradually more advanced exercises.

So the key to picking the right exercise is to find the cause of your headache and neck pain.

6. Q: How often should I do the exercises? And do I need to do them forever?

A: Most people we work with in the clinic for neck pain and headaches do the exercises at least once per day...every day.

Some will do them up to 3 times per day.

Doing the same exact exercises for years without changing might be a mistake (with the exception of stretching).

In general, to get stronger, your exercise should progress and get more difficult as your strength improves.

WE ARE ALL AGING...SO IF WE ARE NOT GETTING STRONGER...WE ARE GETTING WEAKER!

With training your body adapts and gets stronger.

Keeping that in mind, there are 2 rules to training:

1. Everything works.
2. Nothing works forever.

This means that any exercise (although difficult) MAY make you stronger.

But once your body is no longer challenged, it's time to move on to something different or more challenging.

One of the best things you should incorporate into your program during Phases of Healing for your Neck pain and Headaches is a consistent walking program.

People who walk every day have less risk of reinjuring their neck pain and headaches.

7. Q: What do I need to do for complete care? Am I going to relapse?

A: The best thing to do for neck pain and headaches, if you are worried about it coming back again in the future, is to complete all 4 phases of healing.

Phase One is where you focus on getting rid of the pain, numbness and tingling, especially if you have severe headaches.

Phase Two is where you focus on getting normal movement back.

Phase Three is where you focus on getting full strength.

Phase Three is where you go back to previous activities you want to do.

Just because the pain is gone, that doesn't mean that you are fully healed.

In our clinic, when we see a person who had neck pain and headaches...and they are now pain free and have full motion and on their way to attaining full strength, we ask:

"What activities have you avoided in the past month that you want to get back to doing?"

Some will say reading, driving, gardening, golfing or computer work...something along those lines.

And we'll tell that person to take the next month or two and start to incorporate everything you want to do that you could not do before. Most times we guide them as to which activities they should incorporate first. When they have fully attained their previous strength, they should have all previous activities incorporated into their routine.

They keep doing their exercises at home to get stronger and stronger.

Most come back for a re-check appointment in 2 months and have no trouble at all. At that time we can help them progress their exercises to a more challenging program if they need it.

Some do have a relapse.

We then take a look at the activity and at the program and help them get on the right track.

As mentioned before, people who are stronger recover more quickly...People who make good choices in their activities heal more quickly.

So it's usually only one or two visits before that person is on the right track again.

8. Q: How do I know the cause of my pain?

A: There are 3 common causes of neck pain and headaches...and here are some general guidelines for each.

1. People with pain from a herniated disc usually have pain bending forward, especially bending with a twist, or with coughing or sneezing.

The pain they experience is usually sharp, it starts in the neck and runs specifically down into the space between the shoulder blade and the spine, or down the arm and possibly into the hand. If a herniated disc is particularly bad, you may experience weakness in one of your hands.

Herniated disc sufferers are usually 40 years of age or younger.

2. People suffering from neck pain or headaches because of stenosis or arthritis usually answer yes to these 3 questions:

- ✓ 50 Years of age or older?
- ✓ Pain with prolonged turning of your neck?
- ✓ Relief with light activity?
- ✓ Tension type headaches

If the stenosis or arthritis is particularly bad, you may experience tingling in your feet.

3. People suffering with pain from upper thoracic problems usually have pain with rotation combined with extension such as looking over their shoulder quickly, or sometimes desk and computer work. These people get relief with massage and self-manipulation, and you will often see them rubbing their own necks.

The pain they experience usually starts in the neck but is more focused in the upper back region on one side. Sometimes they complain of a knot in their "wing".

If the symptoms are in the right spot, they may cause pain to move up into the head. Symptoms may also include heaviness of one arm, or even pain in the elbows which mimics tendonitis.

It is best to have a neck and arm/head pain specialist diagnose your pain.

9. Q: What kind of headache do I have?

A: There are three general types of headaches.

1. A Tension headache is pain in the head that comes from muscle tightness. The muscles may tighten up for a variety of reasons, but usually because of poor posture, clenching the jaw, stress, eye strain, or from alcohol or tobacco use.

2. There are different types of Migraine Headaches. Most medical providers don't fully understand the migraine, and these types of headaches are often misdiagnosed. These types of headaches are typically associated with vascular constriction and/or nerve pain. Sometimes the headaches are so severe that nausea and vomiting occur. There are a variety of triggers, such as foods, smells, stress, and light.

3. Cervicogenic headache start because the cartilage in joints of the neck become chronically compresses, and this affects the nerve and blood flow and close to that joint. These headaches can start as a tension headache, and progress to a full migraine.

10. Q: Which position should I sleep in?

A: On your back is best. In order to successfully sleep on your back you need the proper firmness of the bed, and proper pillow support. You can train yourself to sleep on your back.

Next would be on your side, however those with shoulder or neck problems may not be able to sleep on your side.

Last would be on your stomach. There are numerous reasons why this is dangerous, and should be avoided at all costs.

Regardless, an important key is to keep your spine in "neutral". This means that it is not twisted to the right or left...but keeps it's natural curve.

Body pillows often can help you sleep in the least painful position for you.