

Neck Pain (Cervicalgia)

TERMINOLOGY

- Neck pain
- Cervicalgia
- Stiff neck

INTRODUCTION

Neck pain is a common problem that can range from a dull, constant ache to a sudden, sharp pain that leaves you incapacitated. It can come on suddenly from an accident, a fall, or from lifting something too heavy. It may also develop gradually, perhaps as the result of age-related changes to the cervical spine. Regardless of how it happens or how it feels, you know it when you have it, and chances are, if you don't have it now, you will experience it sometime in the future. There are many pain sensitive tissues in the neck. This is why it is often difficult to determine the exact origin of neck pain. In some cases neck pain may arise from more than one tissue of the neck. Neck pain may or may not be associated with neurological compromise.

Neck pain can arise from conditions that compress, destroy, or irritate pain-sensitive structures such as the annulus fibrosis, posterior longitudinal ligament, and the capsule of the zygapophyseal joints. Referred pain from internal organ (visceral) disease may cause or contribute to neck pain. Neck pain can also be confused with primary shoulder disease and peripheral nerve disorders. Common conditions thought to cause neck pain include degenerative disc disease, with or without disc herniation, and degenerative arthritis of the spinal (zygapophyseal/facet) joints. The relationship between neck pain and the degree and levels of spinal degeneration do not always correlate well.

PREVALENCE

Neck pain is a common problem in our society. At any given time, approximately 10% of the adult population in the United States is experiencing neck pain. This accounts for about 15-20 million people. Neck pain occurs more frequently than low back pain.