



NECK AND SHOULDER PAIN

The neck is a complex and exposed structure that links the head with the upper part of the body, mainly the chest and the shoulders.

Because of its position and the fact that it is normally very mobile, the neck is often exposed to injury or strain, and cause pain. The pain may be in the neck, but also in other parts of the body: head, jaw, shoulder or arm. Conversely, neck problems can appear as pain elsewhere: had, jaw, shoulder or arms.

Causes of pain

Bad posture puts a chronic strain on the muscles at the back of the neck, and result in muscle spasm, with sometimes severe pain. Sitting in front of a computer that is too high or too low for long hours is typical. Pain can spread to the head or the area above the shoulders, and be confused with a shoulder problem. As a general rule pain above the shoulders is not caused by the shoulder joint.

Whiplash, where the head is thrown forwards and backwards, or sideways, quickly is a cause of pain that can last for weeks.

Cervical degenerative disease is a source of irritation and pain. Osteoarthritis of the facet joints (small joints between the cervical vertebrae, the bones of the neck), or degeneration of the discs can irritate the neighbouring tissues and cause pain in their own right, or muscle spasm which in tern causes cramp-like pain and stiffness.

When severe, degenerative disease of the spine can cause a narrowing of the spinal canal, which is called cervical stenosis. It is worse with activity, and settles with rest and sometimes anti-inflammatory tablets. When severe and unremitting surgery may be necessary

If there is irritation of the nerves as they come out of the spine there can be pain -sometimes sharp, electric shock-like) or numbness or pins and needles sensation. These symptoms can spread to the arms and hands. This is the case with herniated discs.

Your doctor may be able to determine the cause of your neck pain from your history and physical examination, but sometimes other tests, such as X-rays, CT scans and MRI scans, are required to find the exact cause of your symptoms. These scans can assess the spine and be used to show disc problems, spinal cord problems or compression of your nerve roots.

Treatment of neck pain will depend on the diagnosis. You can begin by improving your postural habits, sitting and standing all, with a "long" neck. Check often whether your chin is forward and whether you are 'slouching' shoulders and correct it. If symptoms persist a visit to the doctor is indicated to exclude serious causes of pain, and find appropriate remedies.