



[Find an Orthopaedist](#)

[AAOS Home](#)

[Home](#)

[About](#)

[Orthopaedics](#)

[Glossary of](#)

[Orthopaedic](#)

[Words](#)

[In the News](#)

Languages

[Español](#)

[Other](#)

[Languages](#)

Parts of the

Body

[Shoulder, Arm](#)

[& Elbow](#)

[Hand & Wrist](#)

[Spine & Neck](#)

[Hip](#)

[Knee & Leg](#)

[Foot & Ankle](#)

Categories

[Diseases &](#)

[Syndromes](#)

[Arthritis](#)

[Tumors](#)

[Other Diseases](#)

[& Syndromes](#)

[Broken Bones](#)

[& Injury](#)

[Treatment &](#)

[Rehabilitation](#)

[Joint](#)

[Replacement](#)

[Other Treatment](#)

Copyright 2007 American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons

Neck Sprain

[Symptoms](#)

[Diagnosis](#)

[Treatment](#)

The seven bones of the spinal column in your neck (cervical vertebrae) are connected to each other by ligaments--strong bands of tissue that act like thick rubber bands. A sprain (stretch) or tear can occur in one or more of these ligaments when a sudden movement, such as a motor vehicle accident or a hard fall, causes the neck to extend to an extreme position.

Symptoms

- Pain, especially in the back of the neck, that worsens with movement
- Pain that peaks a day or so after the injury, instead of immediately
- Muscle spasms and pain in the upper shoulder
- Headache in the back of the head
- Sore throat
- Increased irritability, fatigue, difficulty sleeping, and difficulty concentrating
- Numbness in the arm or hand
- Neck stiffness or decreased range of motion (side to side, up and down, circular)
- Tingling or weakness in the arms

[Top of page](#)

Diagnosis

To diagnosis a neck sprain, your doctor will perform a comprehensive physical examination. During the physical examination, the doctor will ask you how the injury occurred, measure the range of motion of your neck, and check for any point tenderness.

Radiographs (X-rays) may be requested so the doctor can look closely at the bones in your neck. This evaluation will help the doctor rule out or identify other sources of neck pain, such as spinal fractures, dislocations, arthritis, and

[& Rehabilitation](#)  
[Sports &  
Exercise  
Prevention &  
Safety](#)  
[Patient Groups](#)  
[Children](#)  
[Seniors](#)  
[Your Healthcare](#)  
[Managing Your  
Health](#)  
[Patient  
Resources](#)  
[Patient Stories](#)

other serious conditions.

[Top of page](#)

Treatment

All sprains or strains, no matter where they are located in the body, are treated in a similar manner. Neck sprains, like other sprains, will usually heal gradually, given time and appropriate treatment. You may have to wear a soft collar around your neck to help support the head and relieve pressure on the ligaments so they have time to heal.

Pain relievers such as aspirin or ibuprofen can help reduce the pain and any swelling. Muscle relaxants can help ease spasms. You can apply an ice pack for 15 to 30 minutes at a time, several times a day for the first 2 or 3 days after the injury. This will help reduce inflammation and discomfort. Although heat, particularly moist heat, can help loosen cramped muscles, it should not be applied too quickly.

Other treatment options include:

- Massaging the tender area
- Ultrasound
- Cervical (neck) traction
- Aerobic and isometric exercise

Most symptoms of neck sprain will go away in 4 to 6 weeks. However, severe injuries, may take longer to heal completely.

[Top of page](#)

Last reviewed: August 2007

AAOS does not review or endorse accuracy or effectiveness of materials, treatments or physicians.

Copyright 2007 American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons

**Your Orthopaedic Connection**

The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons

6300 N. River Road

Rosemont, IL 60018

Phone: 847.823.7186

Email: [orthoinfo@aaos.org](mailto:orthoinfo@aaos.org)

[Editorial  
Board & Staff](#)  
|

[Contributors](#) | [Online  
Agreements](#) |

[Linking  
Policy](#) |

[Advertising &  
Sponsorship](#) |

[Privacy  
Policy](#) |

[AAOS  
News  
Bureau](#)

Copyright ©1995-2011 by the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons. All material on this website is protected by copyright.

All rights reserved. This website also contains material copyrighted by third parties.