



A cervical sprain is an injury in the neck in which the strong, fibrous tissues (ligaments) that connect your neck bones are torn or overstretched. Cervical sprains can range from mild to severe. Severe cervical sprains can cause the neck vertebrae to be unstable. The amount of time it takes for a cervical sprain to get better depends on the cause and extent of the injury. Most cervical sprains heal in one to three weeks.

### CAUSES

Severe cervical sprains may be caused by:

- Contact sport injuries (such as from football, rugby, wrestling, hockey, auto racing, gymnastics, diving, martial arts or boxing)
- Motor vehicle collisions
- Whiplash injuries. This is an injury from a sudden forward and backward whipping movement of the head and neck
- Falls

Mild cervical sprains may be caused by:

- Poor posture
  - Being in an awkward position, such as cradling a telephone between your ear and shoulder
  - Sitting in a chair that does not offer proper support
  - Working at a poorly designed computer station
  - Looking up or down for long periods of time

### SYMPTOMS

- Pain, soreness, stiffness or a burning sensation in the front, back, or sides of the neck. This discomfort may develop immediately after the injury or slowly, 24 hours or more after the injury.
- Pain or tenderness directly in the middle of the back of the neck
- Shoulder or upper back pain
- Limited ability to move the neck
- Headache
- Dizziness
- Weakness, numbness or tingling in the hands or arms
- Muscle spasms
- Difficulty swallowing or chewing
- Tenderness and swelling of the neck

### TREATMENT

Treatment depends on the severity of the cervical sprain.

Mild sprains

- Rest
- Immobilization
- Medication
  - NSAIDS help decrease swelling, pain and fever. **ALWAYS ASK YOUR PROVIDER IF NSAIDS ARE SAFE.**
  - Acetaminophen to decrease pain
  - Prescription pain medicine
  - Muscle relaxant to control spasms

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### Severe cervical sprains

- Immediate immobilization
- Medicines, such as pain relievers, numbing medicines or muscle relaxants.
- Stretching exercises, strengthening exercises and posture training to help stabilize the neck, strengthen muscles and prevent recurrence of symptoms

### **SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:**

- You have pain that is not relieved with rest or medicine or does not improve in one week.
- You develop new symptoms.
- You are generally not feeling well.

### **SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:**

- You have pain that radiates from your neck into your arms.
- You have unusual weakness or numbness in your arms.

