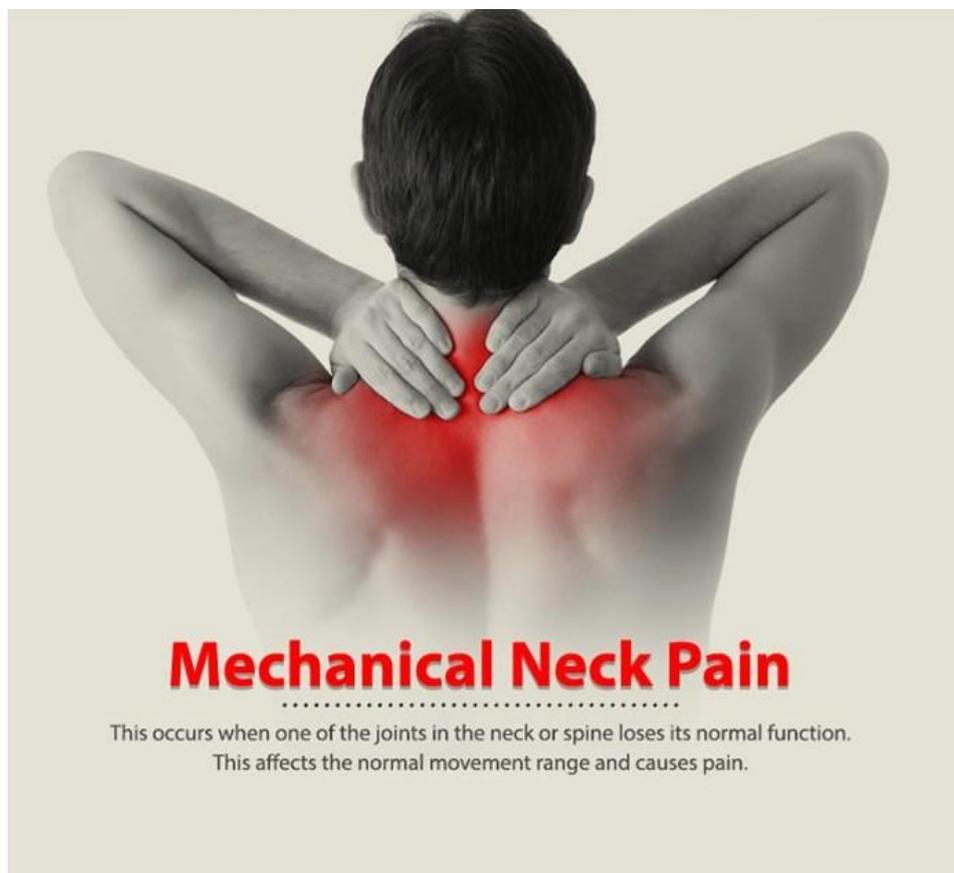




Mechanical Neck Pain



What is Mechanical Neck Pain?

Mechanical neck pain is one of the most common causes of neck discomfort. It refers to pain coming from the **muscles, joints, ligaments, or discs** in the neck—usually due to strain, tension, or age-related changes.

This type of neck pain is **not caused by serious disease** and often improves with simple treatment, exercise, and lifestyle changes.

Common Symptoms

People with mechanical neck pain may experience:

- Aching, stiff, or tight neck muscles
- Pain that worsens with certain movements or long positions
- Difficulty turning the head
- Pain spreading to the shoulders or upper back
- Headaches (often at the base of the skull)
- Muscle spasms
- Tenderness around the neck or shoulder muscles

Symptoms may come and go, and flare-ups are common.

What Causes Mechanical Neck Pain?

Typical causes include:

- **Poor posture** (slouching, looking down at phones/computers)
- **Muscle strain** or overuse
- **Sleeping awkwardly**
- **Prolonged sitting** or holding the neck in one position
- **Stress-related tension**
- **Age-related wear and tear** in the spine (normal changes)
- **Lifting or twisting awkwardly**

Often there is **no single cause**, and symptoms improve with activity and self-care.

When Should I Seek Urgent Help?

Although rare, seek **urgent medical assessment** if you experience:

- Severe neck pain after trauma or a fall

- New weakness, numbness, or tingling in the arms or hands
- Difficulty walking or problems with balance
- Loss of bladder or bowel control
- Fever or weight loss with neck pain
- Neck stiffness with high fever and feeling very unwell

These symptoms are uncommon but important to check.

Diagnosis

Mechanical neck pain is usually diagnosed based on:

- Medical history
- Physical examination
- Movements, posture, and muscle tension

Scans (X-ray or MRI) are rarely needed unless symptoms are unusual or persistent.

Treatment and Management

1. Stay Active & Keep Moving

Movement helps reduce stiffness and pain.

- Avoid long periods in one position
 - Change posture every **20–30 minutes**
 - Gentle neck movements throughout the day
 - Light walking or activity increases blood flow
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2. Exercise Programme

Regular exercises strengthen the neck and shoulder muscles and improve posture.

Helpful exercises include:

- Chin tucks
- Neck range of motion (turning side to side, looking up/down)
- Shoulder blade squeezes

- Upper-back mobility exercises
- Stretching tight muscles (upper traps, chest muscles)

A physiotherapist can provide a personalised programme.

3. Pain Relief

- **Paracetamol**
- **NSAIDs** (e.g., ibuprofen) if appropriate
- Muscle relaxants may help during severe flare-ups
- **Heat therapy** relaxes tight muscles
- **Cold packs** may reduce inflammation during acute pain

Always follow GP or pharmacist advice.

4. Posture Advice

Improving posture reduces strain on the neck.

- Keep screens at **eye level**
 - Avoid looking down at your phone (“tech-neck”)
 - Adjust your workstation (chair, keyboard, monitor)
 - Use a supportive chair with armrests
 - When sleeping, use **one low pillow**
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5. Manual Therapy

Short-term relief may come from:

- Physiotherapy
- Massage
- Joint mobilisation

These help symptoms but work best when combined with exercise.

6. Stress & Lifestyle Management

Stress can increase muscle tension and sensitivity.

- Breathing exercises
 - Relaxation techniques
 - Gentle stretching
 - Regular physical activity
 - Adequate sleep
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7. Injections or Advanced Treatments

Most people do *not* require injections.

However, if symptoms do not improve over time, a specialist may consider:

- Trigger point injections
- Facet joint injections

These are only used after conservative treatments.

Self-Management Tips

- Move regularly throughout the day
 - Apply heat for muscle relaxation
 - Perform daily exercises
 - Avoid heavy bags on one shoulder
 - Take breaks from screens
 - Stay hydrated
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Prognosis

Most people with mechanical neck pain recover within **2–6 weeks**.

Some may experience flare-ups, but these are usually manageable with posture correction and exercise.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is this serious?

No. Mechanical neck pain is common and rarely linked to serious conditions.

Will exercise make it worse?

Gentle, controlled exercise usually helps recovery.

Do I need a scan?

Not usually. Scans rarely change treatment.

Can it come back?

Yes, but maintaining good posture and exercise reduces recurrence.

Where to Get More Help

- **GP or MSK clinician**
- **Physiotherapist**
- **NHS website (neck pain information)**
- **Local MSK service** for persistent symptoms