

# THRIVE

## Neck Pain

Neck pain can have many causes, and many contributing factors. It affects a lot of us at some point in our lives and can be debilitating for some.

### Myths

- × Neck pain means I've damaged structures in my neck and need to rest.
- × Neck pain means I should have a scan.
- × Neck pain means something is out of place.
- × Neck pain gets worse as we get older.
- × If I get headaches with my neck pain, it must be something serious.
- × Neck pain means I need to protect my neck and avoid certain movements.
- × Neck pain is caused by poor posture and is made worse by sleeping on your tummy or swimming the breast-stroke.
- × Surgery is the best treatment for neck pain.

### Facts

- ✓ Neck pain is common without any damage to spinal structures. We know structures in the spine can be get irritated or strained, and how we move can contribute to pain. But other causes of neck pain are common. Poor sleep, our physical activity levels, and stress are bigger predictors of onset and recovery of neck pain than any damage or so-called poor posture!
- ✓ Scans can be helpful, but only in certain cases for a small number of people with neck pain. For 85% of us the results of scans don't influence treatment, and incidental findings can cause unnecessary worry and radiation. A good clinical assessment can determine whether a scan is needed.
- ✓ Neck pain does not mean something is out of place or out of alignment! Despite years of research on this, there is no evidence that spinal structures go out of place (or indeed that they can be manipulated back into place). The spine is a much stronger structure than that!
- ✓ Headaches commonly co-exist with neck pain. Other symptoms like dizziness are also relatively common. In a very small percentage of people this can indicate something serious but for most, these symptoms are referred from the neck or caused by tension. A good clinical examination can screen for anything serious and see whether it's likely your headaches are arising from your neck.

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- ✓ **Treatments that include exercise are the best treatments** for most types of neck pain. Hands-on treatments have also been shown to be helpful to get you moving more comfortably. Injections and surgery are only necessary for a very small percentage of people with neck pain. If your healthcare professional hasn't recommended exercise as part of your treatment plan, you're not getting the best treatment!
- ✓ How we move matters. For many, the way we move contributes to pain persisting. While some people need more strength, a lot of people need to relax their muscles and move more naturally. The strength of shoulder and upper back muscles may also be important.
- ✓ While posture might be relevant for some people's pain, it's not nearly as big a culprit as we've been led to think over the years. Likewise, there's no evidence that sleeping on your tummy or exercises like swimming the breaststroke are harmful for your neck.
- ✓ How we think about neck pain matters - worrying about doing more damage and what will happen in the future can contribute to more neck pain.
- ✓ Lifestyle factors such as sleep, mood and general health are important in neck pain. In fact, studies show they often predict the amount of pain and disability more than physical factors.

## How we can help...

We have the expertise to assess and diagnose the causes and contributions to your neck pain. We will develop a treatment and rehabilitation programme tailored to your needs. Together, we can figure out whether other health or lifestyle factors may be hindering your recovery, so that by addressing these along with your neck-specific issues, you can start to THRIVE again.