

Gentle Neck Exercises

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The neck consists of ligaments and muscles that wrap around seven vertebral discs, known collectively as the cervical spine. Each vertebral disc of the neck is labeled with a number, such as C-1 through C-7. The cervical spine connects to the skull and thoracic spine. Because the neck is capable of bending, extending and rotating movements, it is susceptible to injury or disorders. Gentle exercises can loosen stiff necks, maintain healthy discs and prevent neck pain caused from stress and poor posture. Consult your family doctor to receive medical clearance before performing neck exercises.

Chin-Ups

Chin-ups are a common and simple exercise that lengthens the front and back of the neck. To perform chin-ups, lift your chin toward the ceiling as you inhale to feel the stretch in the front of the neck. Slowly, lower the chin toward the chest as you exhale to lengthen the back of the neck. Perform this motion approximately 10 times in conjunction with your breath.

Lateral Extension

Lateral extensions allow the sides of the neck to lengthen and open from the ear toward the shoulder. To perform lateral extensions, slowly lower your head

toward your right shoulder. Slowly, return to the center and lower the head toward the left shoulder. Imagine that your ear is trying to touch each shoulder. Slowly repeat this motion 10 times.

Neck Rotation

Neck rotation is similar to completing a spinal twist. This exercise increases the range of motion for the head to turn right and left. To complete the exercise, first keep your chin parallel to the floor. Slowly, turn your head toward the right to look over your right shoulder. Gently bring the neck back to center and move the head to look over the left shoulder. Continue this motion slowly for 10 repetitions.

Figure Eights

Figure eights incorporate rotation and lateral extension movements. To perform the exercise, imagine that you are to draw a "sideways" figure eight with your nose. You should inhale as your head moves up the "side" of the eight, and exhale as the head moves downward toward the "center" of the eight. Complete approximately 10 figure eights in each direction.

Neck Half Circles

Neck half circles incorporate a rotation movement. This dynamic stretch lengthens the sides and back of the neck. To perform the exercise, bring your chin toward your chest. Slowly, roll your head toward the right shoulder. Bring the head back to center and roll your head toward the left shoulder. It is important to keep the front of the neck and the jaw relaxed to receive the full range of motion. Continue this motion slowly for 10 repetitions.

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