

# Massage and... neck pain

## What causes neck pain?

There are many potential causes of neck pain, however muscle spasm / tension is the most common cause and is often related to stress, poor posture, lack of sleep, excessive physical activity or lack of activity. In all of these cases massage can provide effective relief, as relieving muscle tension is one of the things massage is best at. Arthritis is another common cause of neck pain that can benefit from massage (see the Massage and Arthritis guide for more information).

Neck (and shoulder) pain is very common among office workers. Sitting at a desk with poor posture causes some muscles in the neck to become overstretched while others become overly tight. Because of the shift in weight distribution caused by poor posture, the affected muscles are not only in the wrong position to work most effectively, they also have to work harder to maintain body position and so become strained, tense and painful.

It is fairly common for muscle tension in the neck to be accompanied by tension headaches. It can also sometimes cause compression of nerves, leading to shooting pain, weakness, tingling or numbness 'referred' elsewhere, especially in the arms and hands - however, these symptoms can also be the result of other factors, which is why medical diagnosis is essential.

Neck pain can also be caused by numerous conditions that are not appropriately treated with Swedish Massage - fractures, meningitis, disc injuries are just a few examples - which is why taking a medical history is so important. The massage therapist will look out for relevant warning signs and may perform safety checks and/or refer the client to a medical practitioner if in doubt.

## How can massage help?

Soothing effects on the nervous system can be highly effective in providing relief by reducing muscle spasm, which is the most common cause of neck pain, while at the same time massage stimulates the release of endorphins - the body's natural painkillers. Additionally, pain is often amplified with stress and so the relaxation effects of massage will also be beneficial.

Regular massage helps to keep muscles and joints supple and healthy and so can be useful in helping to prevent the problem reoccurring. After your massage you may also be shown specific stretches and strengthening exercises designed to help improve condition of affected muscles.

## What else can help?

**In cases where tension is at the root of the neck pain:** improving posture and muscle condition with regular exercise can yield powerful results - Yoga, Alexander Technique and Pilates are just a few forms of exercise that focus on posture; relaxation / meditation classes can help prevent tension building up; office workers should have their workstations assessed to ensure good ergonomics and should have regular breaks to move and stretch; sometimes changing your pillow will help, especially if it's old; excessive rest isn't the best treatment - keep your neck moving within the pain-free range of motion; heat can provide relief - try a hot bath or a heat pack on the shoulders.

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