

# Torticollis

## TYPICAL CAUSE OF NECK PAIN

You wake up one morning, try to get out of bed, and find that your neck is very painful and stiff. You look in the mirror and notice that your neck is tilted to one side. As you try to straighten it, you experience a sharp, knife-like, electrical pain in the back of your neck. You quickly return it to its tilted position to alleviate the pain.

This is the typical case of the neck pain, or "torticollis". It is a rather common occurrence: everyone at one time or another has experienced it to some degree. When severe, torticollis can be very disabling. Normal activities such as getting dressed, driving a car, or trying to sleep, can become very uncomfortable. Headaches at the back of the neck are not uncommon with torticollis. Extreme stiffness, on one side or the other will usually develop as torticollis persists. The stiffness of torticollis can be so intense that muscle spasm can be felt to the touch at the back and side of the neck.

## CAUSES OF TORTICOLLIS

Neck pain of this type usually develops suddenly and for no apparent reason. Typically, the individual will wake up with the neck painful and stiff.

There are, however, some definite causes for this condition, sleeping in an awkward position with the head elevated too high can cause torticollis. A cool draft from air conditioning can trigger its onset. Working in an awkward position for a prolonged period can also bring on torticollis, working under a car, for example, or reaching to hang curtains.

Poor posture can also cause torticollis. The secretary's habit of holding the phone by raising the shoulder to the ear is a common factor. Watching television while lying on the stomach and supporting the chin with both hands is also a likely candidate.

## THE UNDERLYING CAUSE

Awareness of the anatomy of the neck is helpful in better understanding the cause of this condition.

The neck or cervical spine consists of seven movable bones called vertebrae. Each, except for the first and second are separated by spinal discs, which allow for flexibility and also act as cushions or shock absorbers. Between each two cervical vertebrae a pair of spinal nerves exit. These nerves supply the tissues of the neck and arms. They exit from the neck through openings formed between the vertebrae. The neck is also draped with numerous ligaments to provide stability, and muscles to provide a means of movement.

In the case of torticollis, two distinct events occur. One or more of the neck vertebrae become "fixed" and irritate the nerve exiting at that level. Secondly, the muscles of the neck go into extreme spasms. The muscle spasm accounts for the stiffness the individual experiences. The sharp pain is due to the nerve irritation caused by the cervical vertebra, which is not moving or "fixed" out of its proper position.

## CHIROPRACTIC TREATMENT

The chiropractic physician specializes in the examination and treatment of neck disorders. A complete and thorough examination of the patient will disclose the exact cause and severity of the condition. Depending upon examination findings, x-ray studies may be required to determine the exact level of involvement. Only after complete evaluation of the neck will the chiropractic physician recommend a treatment program.

The chiropractic physician is specifically trained to effectively restore normal function to the fixed areas. Manipulative therapy, or "adjustment", is gently administered to restore normal mobility to the restricted vertebrae. Special attention is also given to the intense muscle spasm, which accompanies the condition.