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DOES STRESS CAUSE *Neck Pain?*

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NEWSLETTER

Your Resource for Health, Wellness, and Caring for Your Body

INSIDE: How Physical Therapy Can Help Alleviate Neck Pain
Neck Pain — Muscle vs. Joint



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DOES STRESS CAUSE *Neck Pain?*

Does stress cause neck pain? The short answer is no! At First Choice Physical Therapy, we like to say "contributes to" instead of "cause." The casual way healthcare professionals throw around terms can lead to confusion and, worse still, ineffective treatment. Fortunately, our highly skilled therapists know how to dig deep and find the root cause of your neck pain, and this information helps you find relief!

Let's discuss Nicole, a 40-something-year-old working mother of three. Nicole was used to being very active, balancing her work schedule with getting her kids to all the various activities and school functions that come with being a mom nowadays.

Her neck pain first started as a crick in the neck when she woke up one morning. As the day progressed from driving her kids around to sitting at her desk, she noticed turning her head became more difficult and painful, making focusing on work nearly impossible.

Nicole struggled to figure out why her neck started hurting and came to the conclusion that stress "must be" the culprit. The more pain and difficulty moving she had, the more convinced she was that stress was to blame.

Understanding Nicole's Neck Pain

One of the most common things we hear from our patients is that their pain started for "no apparent reason." Like Nicole, people will wake up with a crick in their neck or notice a stiffness turning when driving in the car. It is also common for people to notice tightness in their upper back and neck after a long day.

So, what is actually the source of the pain? In most cases, there is an issue with the neck joints or the neck muscles due to prolonged positions. Our neck joints don't like remaining in any position for extended periods. In Nicole's case, she first noticed her pain in the morning, which may have been related to her neck position while sleeping. It is also important to note that in Nicole's case, the first sign of any issue was in the morning when she woke up, unrelated to stress.

As Nicole's day progressed, her pain got worse. But this also was more likely related to how she held her neck while driving or sitting at her computer. In both cases, her posture, specifically how she held her neck, seems to have contributed to her pain. Prolonged sitting can lead to a forward head position, resulting in tension to soft tissue (i.e., muscles, tendons, and ligaments) or negative changes to our blood flow.

The muscles of our neck function best when we move them. So, holding her head in one position likely led to irritation of the muscles and affected her ability to move her neck, which in turn caused stress.

Stress "contributes" to neck pain because, when we experience stress, our bodies naturally respond by tensing up as a protective measure. This tension can lead to discomfort, particularly in the neck and upper back region. Research studies have found that individuals with higher stress levels reported increased neck pain as compared to those with lower stress levels. This is why we say "contributes" to, but not the cause of, neck pain.

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How Physical Therapy Can Help Alleviate Neck Pain

We will target the source of your pain by performing a thorough examination, starting with your medical history and details about how, when, and where your symptoms began. As we saw with Nicole, determining how, when, and why the pain started helps us eliminate possibilities and get to the actual root cause(s).

Our therapists will also analyze your posture and movement to identify any limitations or restrictions contributing to your condition. We'll use this information to design a program that addresses your specific needs.

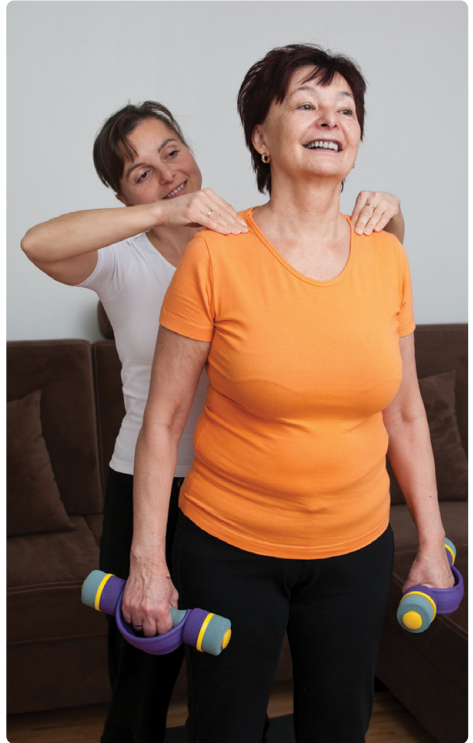
Our treatment plans focus on relieving your pain and improving your posture, mobility, strength, etc., and educating you about managing your symptoms. Your program will likely include manual therapy (i.e., soft tissue work and/or joint mobilizations), targeted stretches, exercises, activity modification, or posture recommendations.

We'll listen to your unique situation and specific issues and then work to help you find relief and get back to your normal routine.

Book Your Appointment Today!

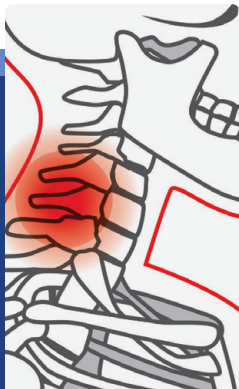
If you're dealing with neck pain or looking for someone to help you figure out what is causing your issues, call us today and set up a consultation!

Sources:
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Are you suffering from pain?

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to start healing today!



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Neck Pain — Muscle vs. Joint

It can be difficult for people to determine where their pain originates. You can use these clues to point you in the right direction:

- Pain on one side = joint pain. Although this, and all other clues, is not 100% true, it is a good starting point. Muscle tension tends to be equally distributed, whereas joint pain is typically one-sided.
- Difficulty or inability to turn = joint dysfunction. Muscle tension tends to make movement uncomfortable or to feel tight on the opposite side of where you're turning towards (pain on the left when turning right). Joint dysfunction usually causes the inability to turn or the sensation of a blockage when turning to the same side as the pain (pain on the right when turning right).
- Pain that travels = joint. Muscles tend to feel tight and sore in the muscles themselves, compared to joint pain, which travels from the source of pain up into the head or down into the shoulder and arm.

Call us at 775-254-8647 to start healing today!

HEALTHY RECIPE



Intimidated by the Gym? Try These Tips

While some people struggle to exercise regularly due to pain or busy schedules, many more find themselves holding back for one simple reason: going to the gym is intimidating.

At First Choice Physical Therapy, we strive to create a welcoming, inclusive environment for all our patients. But we also understand that going to a physical therapy clinic is quite different from going to a gym, where you often have little to no guidance about etiquette, exercise equipment, and more.

Fortunately, our physical therapists can offer a few simple tips for overcoming gym intimidation:

- **Take a few deep breaths.** Deep breathing exercises can help calm your nerves before entering the building. Find a quiet space (your car, an empty corner in the locker room) and take five deep, steady breaths before you start your workout.
- **Don't leave your cell phone in your locker.** We often see our cell phones as needless distractions—but in the gym, that distraction can help soothe anxiety. One study found that cell phone usage during a workout filters out environmental stressors (like that super-buff guy lifting weights beside you). So consider this permission to load up your favorite podcast and plug in your earbuds!
- **Know before you go.** When you walk into a gym, you're met with a maze of cardio and weight machines, free weights, and lots of mirrors. Figuring out a workout program before you step through the doors will help take some of the pressure off. Our physical therapists can help, offering guidance on specific exercises, workout plans, and equipment and gym etiquette instruction.

Gym intimidation is a genuine phenomenon—and the team at First Choice Physical Therapy is here to help combat it! Call us today to learn more.

Sources:
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Juicy Baked Chicken Breast

4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts	1/2 tsp salt
2 tsp olive oil	1/2 tsp black pepper
1 tbsp chili powder	1/2 tsp garlic powder
1 tsp parsley flakes	1/2 tsp onion powder
	1/2 tsp cumin

Preheat oven to 425 degrees F. Line a baking sheet with foil and spray with non-stick spray. Place the chicken breasts between two sheets of parchment paper and pound to an even thickness. Drizzle both sides of chicken with olive oil. Combine seasonings and sprinkle generously over both sides of the chicken breasts. Bake for 20 minutes. Remove from oven and cover loosely with foil for 5 minutes before slicing.

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