

Neck Pain? Pinched Nerve? How to Know if You are Doing the Right Neck Exercises or Stretches.

Neck pain can vary from person to person in location and in intensity depending on your diagnosis, age, and posture. However, here are some common locations of neck pain we see in patients. Initial pain is usually felt at the base of the neck or on one side of the neck or the other.



As neck pain worsens it is often felt in the upper trapezius (between the neck and shoulder) (one side or both sides.) This is often an example of referred pain. Referred pain is pain that originates in the one location (in this case the neck) but spreads to other more distant areas.



As the pain worsens a person may feel the pain in the neck, upper trapezius (between the neck and shoulder) and over the shoulder blade area. Some may also feel it between the shoulder blades. The pain may also begin to extend down the arm to the elbow.



If you have a “pinched nerve” in the neck also known as a radiculopathy you may experience pain further down the arm, past the elbow into the forearm, wrist, and hand. Symptoms of a pinched nerve may include numbness, tingling, burning, and even weakness.



This leads us to an important point. Generally, the more a neck or neck pinched nerve is irritated, the further down the neck and body (upper back/arms) the symptoms of pain, numbness, tingling, weakness, and/or burning may occur.

Fortunately, the reverse is also true, as the nerve becomes less irritated the symptoms generally improve in an ascending fashion. That is less pain, numbness, tingling, weakness and/or burning in the hand or arm. This can help you gauge whether your self-treatments are helping.

In most cases, when you have a pinched nerve in the neck, the nerve is being compressed somewhere along the nerve. Common causes of compression include:

1. Disc. One of the soft jelly-like discs that are located between the bones (vertebra of your neck) may be herniated, or ruptured and pressing on one of the nerve roots leading to possible pain, numbness, tingling, etc.
2. Degenerative changes in your spine, discs, or ligaments often due to age, resulting in a smaller opening for the nerve roots to pass through. The smaller hole may cause increased pressure and irritation of the nerves. This may lead to spinal stenosis.
3. Compression over a nerve from a muscle in your neck.
4. In thoracic outlet syndrome you can have the situation where the nerves (and blood vessels) coming from the neck get compressed between a

person's collarbone and first rib. Thoracic outlet syndrome will not be addressed in this video series.