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How to treat arthritis of neck

If you have neck pain and stiffness, you may have cervical arthritis, also known as cervical spondylosis. Arthritis of the neck is a common problem, affecting about 85% of people over age 60. It is generally caused by wear and tear. Surprisingly, some people with cervical spondylosis have no symptoms. Other people with confirmed neck arthritis have pain that limits neck mobility and may cause problems with activities such as sitting, driving, or light housework. People with cervical spondylosis experience symptoms that vary in intensity. Your pain may be severe, or it may simply be a mild annoyance. The best time to try at-home natural self-care remedies is when your symptoms are mild. They can be the first step before resorting to pain relievers or anti-inflammatory medicine. If you have neck pain due to cervical spondylosis, it is recommended that you check in with your healthcare provider. They can assess your condition and offer you strategies to manage your specific symptoms. When treating neck arthritis, you may find that you need to use one or more natural remedies to find adequate relief. Some people only need one type of treatment, while others need to pick and choose different treatments to find what works best for their specific condition. Some people with cervical spondylosis benefit from using heat or ice for their neck pain and discomfort. Moist heat is used to decrease pain, improve circulation, and relax tight muscles around your neck. Heat can be applied in various ways, including: Soaking in a hot showerUsing a hydrocollator moist hot packPlacing warm compresses on your neckUsing an electric heating pad When using heat, watch out for burns on your skin. Look for excessive redness, skin irritation, or skin discoloration. Heat should be applied for no more than 15 minutes, several times a day. If pain or redness occurs, discontinue use. Ice may be used for acute neck pain or discomfort, as it is considered an anti-inflammatory treatment that decreases pain and swelling by limited blood flow to the body part being treated. Ice may be applied with an ice pack, ice bag, or cold compress. You can apply ice to your neck for 15 minutes several times each day. Ice may cause frost burns. Use ice with a towel, facecloth, or other layer between the ice and the skin to avoid skin damage. Discontinue use if you feel increased pain or note excessive redness and skin irritation. Making changes in your diet may have an impact on your neck pain or discomfort from cervical spondylosis. Consuming an anti-inflammatory diet may decrease joint inflammation and relieve pain. The Mediterranean diet is often cited as one that may be beneficial for people with arthritis. This diet, high in fresh fruit, vegetables, fish, legumes, and red wine or chocolate, has been linked to decreased joint inflammation and improved mobility. Avoiding prepackaged foods, sugary drinks, and red meat is a recommended part of the anti-inflammatory Mediterranean diet. Keep in mind that no diet is the perfect diet for everyone, and you may have to pick and choose various food items to consume for your specific anti-inflammatory diet. The Arthritis Foundation has noted that "while there is no specific 'diet' that people with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) should follow, researchers have identified certain foods that can help control inflammation. Many of them are found in the so-called Mediterranean diet, which emphasizes fish, vegetables, and olive oil, among other staples." Cervical spondylosis can cause chronic pain and discomfort in your neck, and long-term symptoms can potentially wreak havoc on your emotional state. Research supports the use of meditation and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) for people with chronic pain and arthritis. A study published in the Journal of Psychiatry concluded that "meditation is nowadays a practice that should be highly recommended within a nonpharmacological approach for chronic pain therapy." For many people, meditation seems abstract, and finding the right way to participate in meditation may be challenging. Working with a licensed social worker trained in CBT and counseling is a good place to start on the road to using meditation for chronic pain due to neck arthritis. The spice turmeric contains a compound called curcumin that may have anti-inflammatory properties. Research supports the use of curcumin as a natural supplement to help decrease pain and discomfort from arthritis. A meta-analysis in the Journal of Medicinal Food reported that there may be "scientific evidence that supports the efficacy of turmeric extract (about 1,000 mg/day of curcumin) in the treatment of arthritis." The studies included in this meta-analysis are not specific to neck arthritis but rather focused on general rheumatoid and osteoarthritis. Keep in mind that simply using turmeric spice is not enough; your curcumin supplement should contain at least 1,000 milligrams (mg) of the compound. Turmeric spice contains much less than this recommended amount. Tai chi is an ancient Chinese martial art that combines slow rhythmic movements with stretching and mindful meditation. It has been shown to improve mobility, reduce falls, and improve symptoms in people with chronic pain. A meta-analysis studied the efficacy of tai chi on people with osteoarthritis. It concluded that it might be "beneficial for improving arthritic symptoms and physical function in patients with osteoarthritis." The study focused on people with osteoarthritis and not specifically on people with neck arthritis or cervical spondylosis. Still, tai chi is movement and exercise, and exercise has been shown to improve symptoms of pain and stiffness from neck arthritis. Massage feels good, and it may help to relax tight muscles and improve localized circulation to structures in your neck. Some research into specific types of massage has shown promise for reducing neck pain. Cupping involves placing suction-type cups over your muscles. Some small studies have shown that cupping reduces symptoms in patients with chronic neck pain. The American College of Rheumatology has published guidelines for the treatment of osteoarthritis and has stated that the research currently does not support the use of massage as an effective treatment for knee, hip, or hand arthritis. While the guidelines are not specific to cervical spondylosis, it may be helpful to keep in mind there is little evidence that massage provides lasting relief for arthritis. Still, it may be one option to try when seeking out natural remedies for your neck pain. Using home remedies for mild cases of pain or discomfort from neck arthritis is fine, but there are some occasions when checking in with your healthcare provider is important. Symptoms that may require you to visit your healthcare provider for your cervical spondylosis may include: Pain or tenderness in multiple jointsRedness and swelling in your joints that does not resolve within a few daysPain or swelling that limits your normal functional activityPain that is accompanied by fever, malaise, or sudden and unexplained weight loss (This may indicate a more sinister lesion is at play here, like a tumor.) Since cervical spondylosis is a wear and tear condition, you may notice that you have some good days and some bad days. Most often, your home remedies should be able to help you maintain mobility and function when your pain increases. Keeping the pain at bay may be done with exercise and with gentle stretches. If your neck pain from spondylosis lasts for more than a few weeks, check in with your healthcare provider. Neck pain from cervical spondylosis can limit your ability to enjoy your normal work and recreational activities. When you have mild symptoms, it may be a good idea to try natural and nonmedicinal remedies to get relief. You may find that one, or several, at-home remedies can help manage your pain and discomfort. Most importantly, work closely with your physician or healthcare provider to find the best treatment for your specific condition. That way, you will have a strategy to maintain your current active lifestyle. To diagnose cervical spondylosis, your doctor will ask you questions about your symptoms and perform a physical exam. You may also need to undergo imaging studies, such as X-rays or an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging), so that your doctor can view the vertebrae, disks, and ligaments of the neck and look for any abnormalities, such as bone spurs, that may be contributing to your symptoms.Treatment options for cervical spondylosis include:Limiting neck movement, which may mean wearing a cervical collarNon-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) or other pain medication to help relieve your pain and swellingPhysical therapyHeat therapyIce therapyExercises to improve poor postureChiropractic manipulationNeck exercise to strengthen and stretch the cervical spineNeck steroid injections in some casesIn rare cases, surgery may be necessary to relieve pressure on the spinal cord from bone spurs or a herniated diskNeck Pain and Rheumatoid ArthritisAnother type of arthritis that can cause neck pain is rheumatoid arthritis (RA), an inflammatory disease that can damage the joints. While rheumatoid arthritis typically affects the joints of the fingers and wrists, it can also affect other joints, including the neck.Rheumatoid Arthritis SymptomsThe symptoms and signs of inflammation may include:Warm, tender, swollen jointsJoint pain and stiffness in the morning lasting more than 30 minutesFatigueFeverRheumatoid Arthritis Diagnosis and TreatmentA rheumatoid arthritis diagnosis begins with a physical exam and discussion of your symptoms. Your doctor may also order laboratory tests, such as blood tests and X-rays, to get a better understanding of your condition.RA affects each person differently, and treatment will depend on your symptoms and how severe they are. Common treatments for rheumatoid arthritis include:Medications to reduce inflammation and relieve painMedications to slow joint damage, such as disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs) and biologic response modifiersRest when you need itChiropractic treatment to alleviate neck pain through adjustments to your neck's vertebraeSplints to support swollen, painful jointsSurgery when necessary; this may involve joint replacement (depending on the joint involved), reconstruction of tendons, or removal of inflamed tissue.Ways to Treat Neck Pain at HomeIn addition to medical treatments, consider:Exercise. When your disease isn't active, get moving — just don't overdo it. In moderation, it can reduce your pain, help with movement, make you feel less tired, and it's just a good thing to do for overall health. Your local chapter of the Arthritis Foundation may offer water exercise and other kinds of classes specifically for people with arthritis.Ice packs. The next time you need to reduce swelling and pain, go to your freezer and grab a bag of frozen peas or corn — these aids conform easily to the neck area.Not smoking. If you smoke, find a way to stop. The chance of complications from RA increases if you smoke, as do your odds of developing osteoporosis.Warm baths. Besides helping with sleep, a warm bath can soothe achy joints and relax muscle tension.Herbal remedies. If you're looking for natural relief, turmeric, the common kitchen spice, is known to be an anti-inflammatory and may reduce neck pain caused by inflammation. Boswellia is another natural pain reliever with anti-inflammatory properties.Yoga exercise. This ancient practice, which involves stretches, poses, and meditation, is not only a great exercise, but it also relieves stress and neck pain by reducing tension.Massage. Have your partner or a professional gently massage your neck where it hurts, for temporary relief.Neck Pain: Related ConditionsNeck pain is common among those who are 50 or older. "But I have children who come into my office with neck pain," says Robin Lustig, DC, CCSP, of New Jersey Total Health in Lodi, N.J.Other common causes of neck pain include:Pinched nerve. This occurs when too much pressure is placed on a nerve by surrounding tissue. The pain from a pinched nerve in your neck can radiate into your shoulders, arms, or back. When you have a pinched nerve, you may also feel numbness or tingling in the area.Injury or trauma such as a car accident or a fall. Injury or trauma to the neck can have long-lasting effects and cause arthritis years later, Dr. Lustig says.A stiff neck. This is when it's painful or difficult to move your neck from side to side. "A stiff neck can be caused by sleeping on your stomach in a funny position for a long time or from a muscle that went into spasm," Lustig says.Cervical myelopathy. This condition occurs when the spinal cord channel in the back of your neck narrows, putting pressure on the spinal cord, which can result in neck pain and numbness or weakness in your hands, arms, legs, and feet.Shoulder arthritis. "People often develop shoulder arthritis where there is wear and tear or overuse," Lustig says. The pain from shoulder arthritis can radiate into the neck.Poor posture. If you sit hunched over your computer all day or hold the phone with your neck while you're working at your computer, your neck can hurt at the end of the day.Tumors. A tumor in the cervical region of the spine will cause neck pain and should be examined to determine the best course of treatment. As the tumor grows, it can cause pain as it compresses different nerves.Meningitis. Neck pain and stiffness is a primary symptom of this infection, which can be life-threatening. If your neck pain and stiffness is accompanied by fever and vomiting, see your doctor immediately.Lack of magnesium. Magnesium is a mineral that plays an important role in the way our bodies function. Many people lack magnesium in their diet. Researchers have linked a lack of magnesium to cramps, twitches, muscle tension, soreness, and back and neck pain.New Research on Neck PainArthritis cannot currently be cured, but researchers are working from many different angles to learn how this disease develops in order to find a cure.Some of the new research on arthritis includes:Focus on cells. Scientists are studying T-cells, a major player in immunity. They want to find out how inflammation starts so they can stop it.Gene study. To find the genes responsible for rheumatoid arthritis, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Arthritis Foundation are supporting the North American Rheumatoid Arthritis Consortium. At 10 research centers around the United States, scientists are gathering information and genetic samples from 1,000 families in which at least two siblings have the disease.Other studies. Researchers are also looking at hormones, bacteria, and viruses in the hope of learning more about RA.Clinical trials. As for research into cervical spondylosis, a recent look on the NIH clinical trials Web site turned up eight trials involving this disorder.Neck Pain Prevention is Key You can prevent some neck pain with these steps:Learn stretching exercises. Consult a physical therapist if necessary. You should stretch every day especially before and after you exercise. If after exercising, your neck hurts, apply ice immediately.Keep your back and neck supported. This is a must, especially sitting at your computer. If your computer is at eye level, it will keep you from having to look up and down and constantly change your neck position. Use a headset when talking on the telephone to avoid straining your neck.Sleep with support. Use a firm mattress. If your neck is sore in the morning, you might want to buy a pillow that supports your neck as well.Click it. Protect yourself from trauma by always using a seat belt when riding in a car.Managing neck pain requires a consistent approach and carefully following the treatment plan outlined by your healthcare provider. You're the one in charge of making sure you take the time to exercise, strengthen, and soothe muscles. At times you'll feel challenged, but if you stay determined, you'll have the best possible outcome.

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