



## Your guide to two simple neck exercises

Neck pain is something that plagues nearly everyone at some point in their lives. It ranges from minor to severe and can occur for several different reasons, including:

**POOR POSTURE** — Constantly hunching forward at a desk or when looking down at your smartphone puts strain on the muscles and soft tissue in your neck. This can eventually lead to chronic pain and stiffness related to tension in the soft tissue and increase pressure on the spine.

**INJURY** — A traumatic injury to the neck, such as whiplash, can cause strains, sprains, tears and other injuries that lead to long-lasting pain and stiffness in the neck.

**HERNIATED DISC** — Each of the vertebrae in your spine are separated by flat discs filled with thick fluid that absorb shock from impacts and prevent friction from occurring between the vertebrae. Prolonged pressure or a traumatic injury can cause one or more of these discs to herniate, which means the outer wall of the disc bursts and the fluid it contains escapes out. When this happens, the fluid puts pressure on the nerves in your spinal cord, which is painful and can limit your range of motion.

**ARTHRITIS** — Arthritis causes the cartilage in your joints to break down, which can affect the cartilage in the vertebrae of your spine. Arthritis in the vertebrae in your spine causes pain and limits your range of motion.

**SPINAL STENOSIS** — Spinal stenosis is a condition in which the spinal column grows more narrow, which results in an increase of pressure on the nerves in the spinal cord. This may develop on its own or as a reaction to an injury or a condition like arthritis. The increase of pressure can create pain and stiffness in the neck.

Regardless of the cause of neck pain, it's important to find treatment from a professional if you want to improve your quality of life. Treatments vary for everyone depending on the cause and severity of neck pain, but generally, most people with neck pain can benefit from exercises.

You can try exercising your neck right now in the comfort of your own home or wherever else you're comfortable. Performing these exercises will not likely cure your neck pain immediately, but after some time and consistency in exercising, you should notice an improvement in the condition of your neck.

There are two neck exercises you can try right now.



# #1 Cervical retraction in a seated position

**The goal of cervical retraction is to stretch the muscles in the back of your neck.** This helps keep these muscles strong and flexible, which can reduce tension in the muscles and keep pressure off the spine.

The steps for cervical retraction in a seated position are:

## 1. Sit with your back straight.

Use a chair with firm lower back support if it helps. Your ears should be square with your shoulder and your spine should be in a straight line.

## 2. Use your fingers to push your head back.

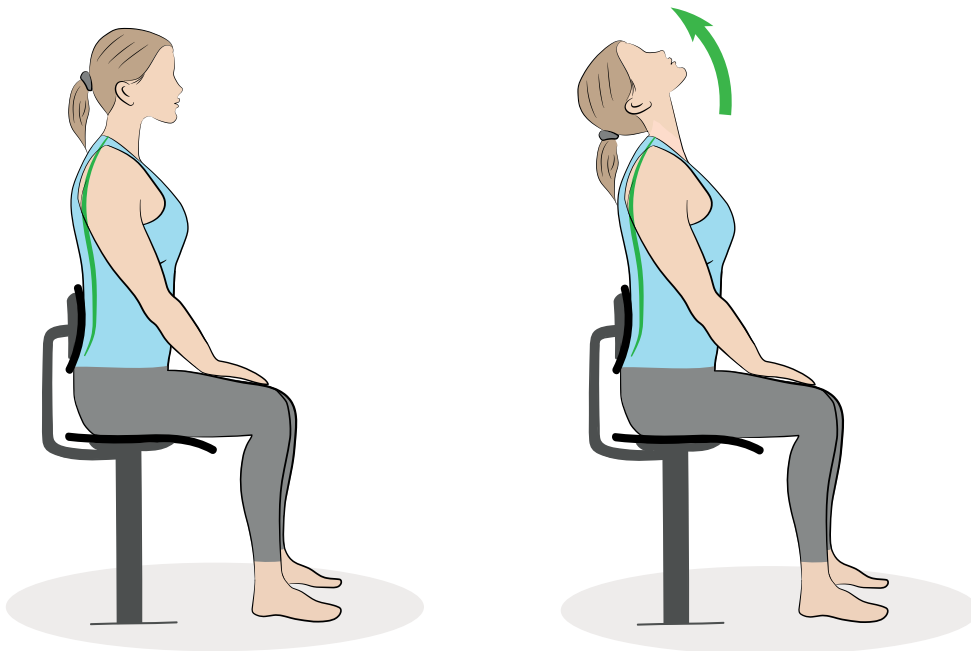
While keeping your spine straight, use your fingers to push on your chin and guide your head backward until you reach a point of resistance. You should feel the muscles in the back of your neck stretching at this point.

## 3. Hold for one to two seconds.

Hold this stretched position for just a couple of seconds and release. Allow yourself to rest for a few seconds before repeating the exercise.

## 4. Repeat up to 10 times.

You should aim to perform this exercise for eight to 10 repetitions but it's OK to do less if it's more comfortable. As your neck muscles develop strength and flexibility, you should be able to perform more repetitions and stretch the muscles farther back.



## #2 Scapular retractions

**The muscles and soft tissue in your neck and shoulders are closely connected.** Exercising your scapula (your shoulder blades) provides support for the neck to help reduce pain and tension.

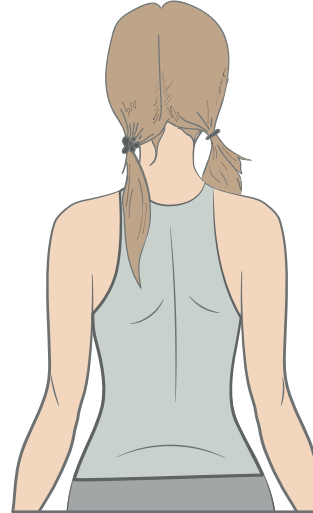
The steps for scapular retractions are:

### 1. Sit with your back straight.

You can do this exercise while standing as well, but it may be more comfortable to sit in a chair that provides lower back support. You want to make sure your spine and neck are straight. Your ears should be square with your shoulders.

### 2. Pinch your shoulder blades together.

While keeping your spine straight, draw your shoulders back as though you are trying to pinch your shoulder blades together. You should feel a gentle stretch across your shoulders.



### 3. Hold for one to two seconds.

When you reach a point of resistance in this exercise, hold the position for a few seconds. Then, release and allow yourself to rest for a few seconds before repeating.

### 4. Repeat 20 to 30 times.

Your goal should be to do this exercise for 20 to 30 repetitions, but it's OK if you cannot do this many right away. As you continue to perform this exercise over time, you should be able to handle more repetitions and stretch your shoulders further back.



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**Are you ready to take the next step in treating your neck pain?** Our physical therapists at SSOR can examine your condition and guide you through the exercises and other treatments that help reduce and prevent neck pain and tension. **Contact our team today** for more information about neck exercises or to schedule a complimentary screening.