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Where Neck Pain Begins



Overview

Neck pain is a common problem that severely impacts the quality of your life. It can limit your ability to be active. It can cause you to miss work. Many different causes may lead to pain in your neck.

About the Cervical Spine

Let's learn about the structure of the cervical spine to better understand neck pain. Your cervical spine is made up of seven cervical vertebrae. Between these vertebrae are discs. They cushion the bones and allow your neck to bend and twist.

Spinal Cord and Nerves

The spine protects your spinal cord, which travels through a space called the spinal canal. Branches of spinal nerves exit the spine through spaces on both sides of your spine. These travel down to your shoulders and arms.

Common Causes of Pain

In many cases, neck pain is muscle-related. Muscle tension, cramps and strains can all cause discomfort. Neck pain can also be caused by compression of the spinal nerves. Herniated discs or bone growths caused by osteoarthritis can press against the nerves. Fractures of the spine can reduce the amount of space around them. This type of pain may not go away, even after weeks.

Symptoms

Symptoms of neck pain can vary depending on the cause of your pain and the severity of your injury. You may have muscle spasms. You may have headaches. You may have trouble bending and rotating your neck. These symptoms may get worse with movement. Problems in the neck can also cause pain in your shoulders. It can cause tingling or weakness in your arm, and numbness in your arm or hand.

Treatment

Some types of neck pain are treated with over-the-counter medications and ointments. Your healthcare provider may recommend prescription medications, cortisone injections or physical therapy. You may benefit from a cervical collar. This stabilizes your neck. If these methods are not effective, you may benefit from surgery to correct a problem in your cervical spine.