

Injury Bulletins

Acute Wry Neck



Description

Acute wry neck is a relatively common injury that can be extremely painful for the patient. A sudden onset of sharp neck pain associated with muscle spasm and a reduction in range of movement characterizes this condition. Often, sleeping with the neck in an abnormal position or a sudden movement upon waking can cause an acute wry neck. Patients can be unable to move the neck in one or more directions due to pain and spasm which can be quite alarming. Fortunately, this condition resolves quickly.



Anatomy

There are two types of wry neck.

1. **Discogenic:** in older patients with more gradual onset, most commonly occurring when waking after sleeping in an awkward position.
2. **Facet joint:** in the younger patient from adolescence to 30 years, usually associated with a flick of the head or sudden movements

Signs and Symptoms.

- Painful stiff neck
- Neck often will be held to one side and/or rotated away from the painful side
- There may be some radiation of pain into shoulders or upper limbs, especially in discogenic wry necks.
- Movement causes more sharp pain
- Muscle spasm

Immediate Care.

- Rest (you may find that sitting or lying with your neck supported the most comfortable position)
- Heat/Ice (you may find temporary relief from a warm heat pack or ice placed on your neck)
- Physiotherapy
- Pain medication

Treatment

Initial management of an acute wry neck involves an accurate assessment by a physiotherapist to diagnose the type of wry neck injury. Which structures, including discs, ligaments, or facet joints can be examined and manual hands-on therapy to restore movement and reduce pain can be commenced.

Your physiotherapist can reduce pain and muscle spasm and restore range of movement by using treatments such as:

- Cervical spine Mobilisation techniques
- Soft collar immobilization if needed
- Manual traction
- Soft tissue massage
- Heat/Ice
- Muscle strengthening and stretching
- Posture re-education and sleeping advice

Please feel free to discuss any problems or queries with your physiotherapist or get up to date treatment options by subscribing online at www.rehabonthenet.com.