

When Backing Up the Car Becomes a Pain in the Neck



That pain you feel when turning your head while backing up your car is probably due to tightness in the muscles of your neck and upper back, often the result of years of **poor posture**. To improve your posture, keep your neck in a “neutral” position, with your chin more tucked in than pushed forward. When you walk, stand or sit, pretend that a string is pulling you from the top of your head, elongating your neck and spine.

At your computer, adjust your chair so the monitor is at eye level, the chair supports your arms and your knees are a little lower than hip level. While driving, adjust the seat so that you are neither too far nor too close to the steering wheel and pedals. Use a lumbar roll or support for your lower back when you drive or sit in your computer chair. Avoid reading in bed propped up on pillows, which often thrusts the head and neck forward. While sleeping, use a pillow that does not place your head at an angle that is too high or too low. Lie on your side with your bottom leg straight and your top leg bent or resting on a pillow placed between your legs.

In addition, you can perform the following exercises at home, preferably upon waking and again just before bedtime:

- **Shoulder roll:** With arms and neck relaxed, slowly roll both shoulders in a circular motion, front to back. Repeat 5 times, then another 5, rolling back to front.
- **Chin tuck:** From a neutral position, gently pull your chin down and in toward your neck. Return to the original position. Repeat 5 times.
- **Head turns:** From a neutral position, slowly turn your head to the right; then return slowly to the original position. Repeat 5 times, and then 5 more times to the left.

Once medical causes, like arthritis, have been ruled out, we can make sure you are performing the exercises correctly and modify them as necessary. If weakness is identified, we may provide specific strengthening exercises. Recovery from neck pain can take a few weeks to a few months. Following the exercise regimen we have designed for you will alleviate stiffness and discomfort and restore flexibility, strength, stability and range of motion in your neck.