[1]Neck Exercises

<u>Stretching and Increasing Mobility</u>

Below you will find **stretching exercises specifically for the neck**. If you suffer from a **stiff neck** or a **pinched nerve in the neck**, these exercises with give you pain relief. These are good stretches for you neck and will help you keep your neck flexible and mobile. Keep in mind that if you are having neck pain due to a cervical radiculopathy (pinched nerve in the neck), do these exercises under the guidance of your Dr, your trainer or physical therapist.

More pain and neck stiffness means you will have do these exercises slowly and only to the point that you can feel the stretch- <u>you never want to do them to the point of pain</u>. This is especially important if you suffer with **neck arthritis** or **degeneration in the cervical spine**. Keeping the joints moving and flexible is very important for patients with **arthritis in the neck**. The goal of these neck stretches is to:

- Stretch the Neck Muscles
- Improve flexibility
- Restore the full range of motion in the neck
- Maintain Mobility for patients who have arthritis of degeneration of the cervical spine
- Increase range of motion in the neck.
- Decrease neck stiffness
- Decrease neck pain and inflammation
- Be able to carry out your activities of daily living without a stiff neck, or neck pain- for example- we want you to be able to **check your blind spot with out neck pain while driving**
- Prevent neck pain and upper back pain at the end of the day when you work on the computer all day

In the cervical spine, we are looking to increase range of motion in

- Flexion (bringing your head and neck forward)
- Extension (bringing your head and neck back- looking up the ceiling)
- Lateral Flexion (right ear to the right shoulder, same on the left)
- Rotation (turning your head and neck from side to side)
  *** Always make sure you breathe while doing neck stretches. This is very important as it will help you to relax the neck muscles while taking them through the normal neck range of motion.

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[1] Adapted from website
http://www.arc4life.com/site/615058/page/993935

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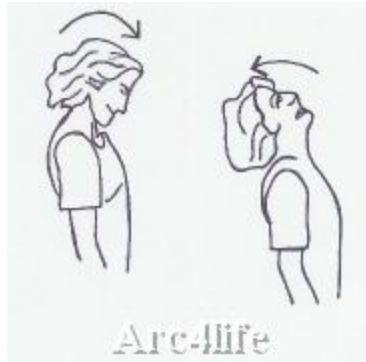
1. The first neck exercise is called **Cervical Flexion** (bringing your chin to your chest) and **Cervical Extension** (looking up to the ceiling). You want to start by tucking your chin in and gently bringing your head foward and attempting to touch the chin to the chest. Next, gently bend the head backwards as far as it will go. Repeat this exercise 5 times. Forward head flexion is great for those patients who suffer from **hypertonic cervical parapinals**- which is essentially pain in the back of the neck.


Lateral Flexion

2. The next neck exercise is called **Lateral Flexion**. Bring your right ear to your right shoulder as far as you are able to. Do not rotate or turn your head when you are doing this neck stretch. Then bring your left ear to the left shoulder. Repeat this for 5 times

Rotation

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3. Next part of the program is called **Rotation of the Cervical Spine**. In this exercise you want to turn your head to the right as far as you possibly can, trying to bring your chin over your shoulders. When you are doing this neck exercise, do not bring up your shoulders. Hold this position for 3 to 5 seconds. Next do this on the left side of the neck and repeat for 5 times.
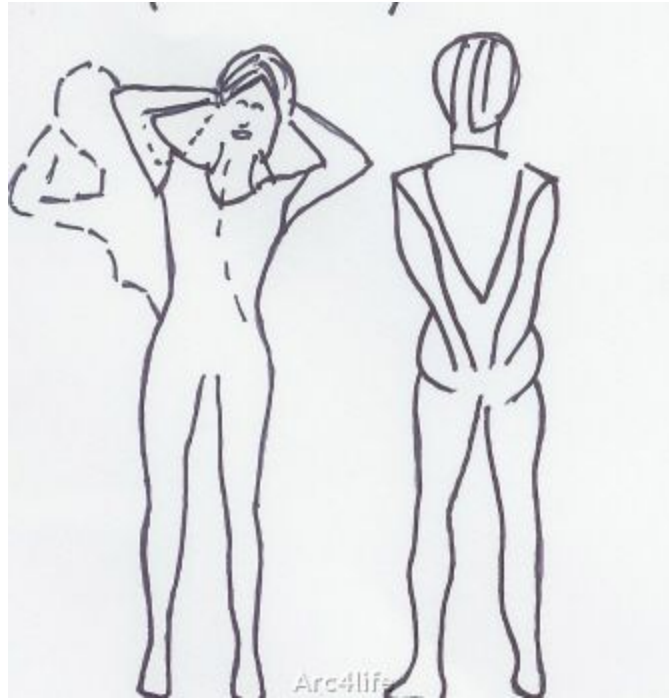
4. For the last part of the neck stretching exercise you want to stand with you feet shoulder width apart and place your hands behind your head. Bend from side to side, making sure to bend only with the upper back area and not with the waist or hips. Try to reach the upper elbow to the celing. Hold each movement for 3-5 seconds. Now do the same thing with the left side.

5. Standing with your feet apart shoulder length, clasp your hands behind your back, and pull downward toward the floor with your hands. Take a deep breath in and stand on your toes and look at the ceiling while exerting the downward pull. Hold this stance for 3-5 seconds, then exhale slowly. Relax and repeat 5 times.

Remember neck stretches should always be peformed in a slow and smooth fashion. Especially for those patients who suffer from acute neck pain due to a stiff neck, pinched nerve in the neck, cervical radiculopathy or other severe pain- make sure you do the motions slowly. If anytime you feel neck pain or a "twinge" in the neck, stop doing that exercise immediately. Finally, remember to breathe and relax while doing the neck stretches.

Strengthening the Neck Muscles

Next we want to discuss a system of exercises that will strengthen the neck muscles. These neck exercises will help to **make your neck stronger**. This includes your cervical paraspinal muscles, and subocciptial muscles. These exercises are called **Isometric exercises**. Isometric exercise *is a type of exercise involving the static contraction of a muscle without any visible movement in the angle of the joint.* In simple terms this means that in these exercises the length of the muscle does not change. As you continue to do these strengthening exercises for the cervical spine you will gain strength in your neck. Over time you should be able to increase the force and number of times you are able to perform the exercises.

1. Press your palms against your forehead and push against each other, resisting motion. Hold this position for 5 seconds and repeat this exercise 3 times.
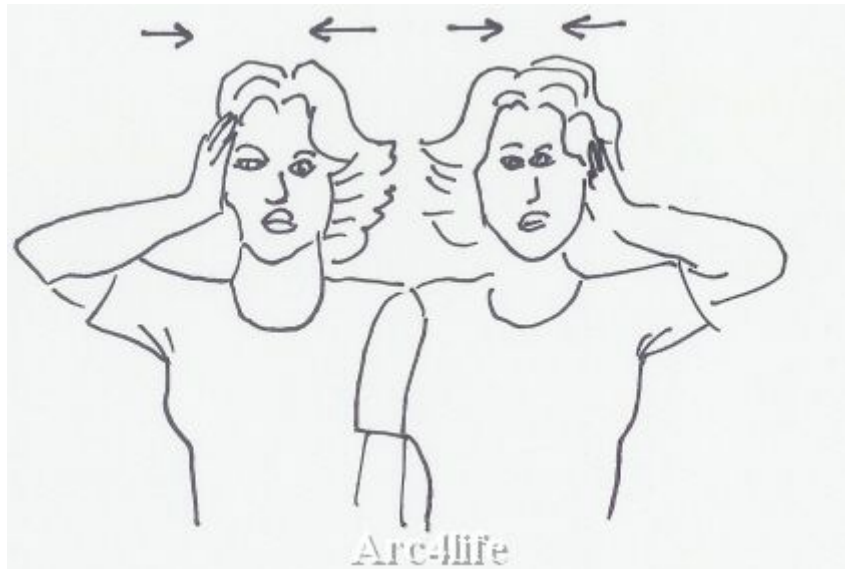
2. With this next cervical strengthening exercise place your hand against the side of your head. Try to bring to your ear to your shoulder, resisting the motion. Repeat this exercise on the other side. Hold each position for 5 seconds and when finished *relax slowly*.

3. Cup both hands against the back of your head. Attempt to push your head back, resisting the motion. Hold this position for 5 seconds, and when finished *relax slowly*.

4. In the final cervical strengthening exercise, put your right hand against the right temple. Attempt to turn your chin to your right shoulder, resisting the motion. Repeat this on the left side. Hold for 5 seconds, then *relax slowly*. Do this neck exercise 3 times.