

PAIN & INJURY GUIDE

Stiff neck after sleeping: your 5-minute routine



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Simple movements to ease a stiff neck back into motion after a bad night's sleep.

How often: Once or twice a day, and a few extra gentle turns through the day if it feels stiff.

Total time: about 4 minutes. **You will need:** a sturdy chair.

Before you start

- This is general information based on NHS physiotherapy leaflets. It is not a personal treatment plan. If a doctor, physiotherapist or osteopath has given you different advice, follow that.
- Move slowly and smoothly. Mild discomfort or a stretching feeling is fine. Sharp pain is not.
- The pain should settle back to your usual level within an hour or two. If it is worse the next day, do fewer repeats or a smaller movement, or leave that exercise out for a few days.

Your routine

1

Gentle neck turns

about 1 min

Sit or stand tall with your shoulders relaxed.
Slowly turn your head to look over one shoulder, as far as is comfortable, then turn to the other side.

How much: 5 turns each way, slowly

2

Gentle side bend

about 1 min

Sit tall. Tip your ear towards your shoulder without lifting the shoulder.
Go only as far as is comfortable, then return to the middle and repeat on the other side.

How much: 5 each side

3

Chin tuck

about 1 min

Sit tall with your eyes level.
Glide your chin straight back, as if making a double chin, until you feel a gentle stretch at the back of your neck.
Return to the start.

How much: 10 slow repeats

4

Chest stretch

about 1 min

Sit forward on your chair with your arms by your sides and thumbs pointing forwards.
Open your arms out to the sides until you feel a stretch across your chest. Keep your shoulders back and down.

How much: Hold 20 seconds, 2 times

Good to know

- Keep using your neck as normally as you can through the day.

Easier, or harder?

- Too sore? Do fewer repeats, make the movement smaller, or miss that exercise out for a few days.
- Feeling good? Only add a few repeats, or a second set, when the routine feels easy and comfortable. There is no rush.

Keep track

Tick a box each day you do your routine.

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Week 1							
Week 2							
Week 3							
Week 4							

Get urgent help first, and do not exercise, if you have any of these

Call 999 straight away if neck pain comes with any of these. They can be signs of a stroke, meningitis or another emergency.

- Sudden severe headache unlike any you have had before
- Dizziness with double vision, slurred speech, facial droop, difficulty swallowing or weakness in an arm or leg
- Neck stiffness with a high temperature, severe headache, rash or dislike of bright light

See your GP promptly, or call NHS 111, if

- Neck pain after a significant fall, accident or blow
- Numbness, tingling or weakness spreading into the arms or hands
- Unexplained weight loss or a history of cancer with new neck pain

Stop these exercises if

- If any neck exercise makes you dizzy, or brings on pins and needles or arm symptoms, stop and speak to your GP.
- If you are not improving after about 4 weeks, or things are getting worse sooner, get it checked. A GP, physiotherapist or osteopath can assess what is going on and adjust your exercises.

Want your problem assessed?

If you would like your symptoms assessed, you are welcome to book an appointment with Lance Peterson Osteopathy in Chichester: lancepetersonosteopathy.co.uk/book.html · 07899 358698. Osteopathic care is not right for everyone, and if something needs medical attention first, you will be told.

The full plain-English guide, with the common questions and sources, is at:
lancepetersonosteopathy.co.uk/guide/stiff-neck-after-sleeping.html

Based on

The exercises are described in my own words from these NHS and Chartered Society of Physiotherapy resources. Repeats and holds are kept to the gentle, beginner end of the ranges they give. Links were checked in October 2026.

- University Hospitals Sussex NHS Trust: Self treatment of acute neck pain (2025)
<https://www.uhsussex.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/2174.1-Self-treatment-of-acute-neck-pain-2025.pdf>
- Chartered Society of Physiotherapy: Video exercises for neck pain
<https://www.csp.org.uk/conditions/neck-pain/video-exercises-neck-pain>
- Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital NHS: Desk exercises
<https://ourspace.rjah.nhs.uk/personal-fitness/desk-exercises/>