

Wellness for Musicians Series...

PAIN IN THE NECK

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When playing your
instrument becomes
a pain in the neck...
literally.

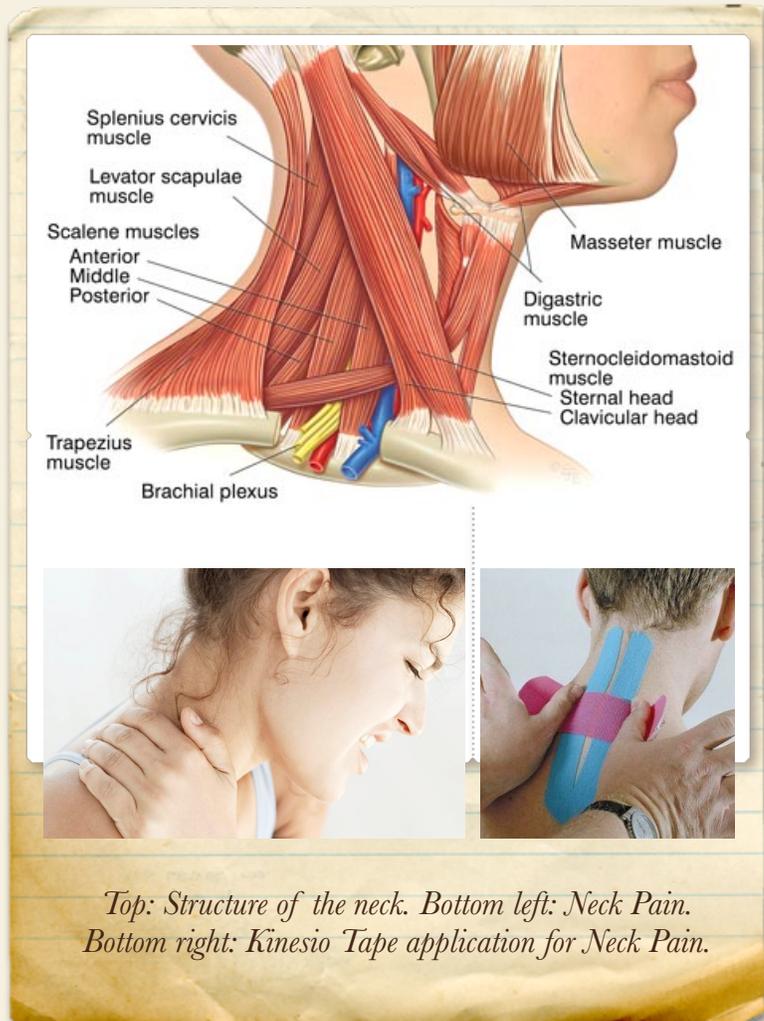
Keep your neck happy.

Note:

the following article is for informational purposes only and is not intended to diagnose or prescribe any illness or condition, or be a substitute for the advice provided by your physician or other healthcare professional. When in doubt, please consult your physician.

Has playing your chosen instrument become an exercise in self torture and pain tolerance? After playing, do headaches and neck pain seem to plague you for hours, or even days? If so, a self care routine may be in order!

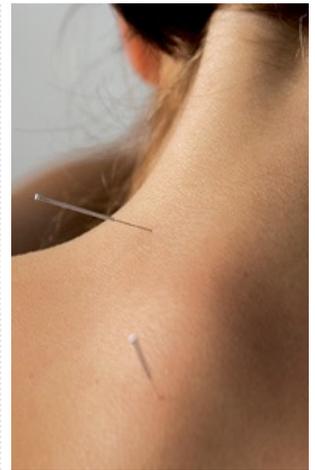
The neck and shoulder areas can become tight and painful for any number of reasons - poor posture, excessive/repetitive motions, or even structural impingements. When left untended, these tight or painful situations can become more severe conditions that could require quite a bit of outside care (read: help from wellness professionals) to resolve or even to just maintain a painless state.



*Top: Structure of the neck. Bottom left: Neck Pain.
Bottom right: Kinesio Tape application for Neck Pain.*



Massage as a possible treatment for neck pain.



Acupuncture for neck pain.

STRUCTURE OF THE NECK

Picture the trunk of a tree: this is our spinal cord, which connects to the brain at the base of the skull, and runs down through the spinal vertebrae to the sacrum (our tailbone). From that trunk, there are many branches stemming out - our spinal nerves. As branches do, they lengthen out and split into many smaller branches. It is the same with our nerves.

The Thoracic ("Thor-a-sic") Nerve is what innervates, or controls, a lot of the neck, shoulder, and arm. Of course, smaller nerves stemming from this actually innervate muscles, but picture the Thoracic Nerve as the biggest, thickest part of the branch, coming directly from the trunk of the tree. The Thoracic Outlet, or opening in the bone and tissue where the Thoracic Nerve and other nerves and blood vessels thread through in order to enter the arm, is just

underneath the skin in the triangle the neck, collarbone, and Trapezius (a large shoulder muscle) makes that you can see.

On some people, this area is structurally very small, or has been damaged through an injury and has therefore built up a lot of scar tissue or other deformities while healing. If this is the case, when their muscles contract through playing their instrument, they may have pain, numbness, or tingling in the neck, shoulder, arm, or hand (or all of these). These could be signs and symptoms of Thoracic Outlet Syndrome, which is a condition where blood vessels and nerves in the Thoracic Outlet become pinched by the muscle tissue and decrease blood flow and feeling into the shoulder, arm, or hand. **If you experience any sharp pain, numbness, or tingling, please consult your physician.**

If you have had a prior injury to the neck or shoulder area that was not resolved fully and properly (like whiplash, rotator cuff tears/pulls, strains, etc.), it can haunt you later in life.

Taking care of your neck...

TREATMENTS AND SELF CARE

Even if you do not have any underlying conditions, playing your instrument combined with whatever you may do for work (excessive computer work, hard labor, etc.) may exacerbate the musculature of the neck and shoulders, and give you pain. A dedicated, daily (if possible!) self care routine would be of great benefit for anyone, even if you aren't currently experiencing any pain (an ounce of prevention is worth MORE than a pound of cure...). If you can find 5 minutes a day, you can do a self care routine. If you haven't already, please evaluate (or have someone evaluate for you) your posture while playing - are you craning your neck? Hunching your shoulders? Raising your shoulders? Are your hands in correct positions (i.e. fiddlers not collapsing wrists)? Are you using correct musculature while playing (i.e., pipers using arms and not shoulders to squeeze bags, drummers using forearms and wrists and not the entire arm and shoulder...)? A daily self care routine may keep issues from getting worse, but cannot correct bad playing postures! Wellness professionals can also be a help to combat neck pain. Keep in mind, what works for some, may not work for all! Everyone is different! Possible non-drug options for neck pain follow:



Yoga for neck pain.

CLINICAL MASSAGE

Clinical Massage performed by a licensed massage therapist can be a great option for a regular treatment. Massage loosens soft tissues (muscles and fascia) to open impingement areas. Look for state licensed and/or nationally certified massage therapists, who specialize in one or more of the following modalities: Orthopedic Massage, Myofascial Release, Musculoskeletal Massage, or Neuromuscular Therapy.

ROLFING

A distant cousin to Massage Therapy, Rolfing Structural Integration is a form of bodywork that reorganizes the connective tissues, called fascia, that permeate the entire body using very slow, deep, targeted technique on the structural muscle level. Often given a bad rap for being a painful modality, Rolfing is extremely beneficial modality that can address many layers of issues or injuries. Look for a Rolf Institute trained and

A daily self care routine may keep issues from getting worse, but cannot correct bad playing postures!

Possible treatments to consider...

NON-DRUG OPTIONS FOR THE WELLNESS CONSCIOUS

CHIROPRACTIC

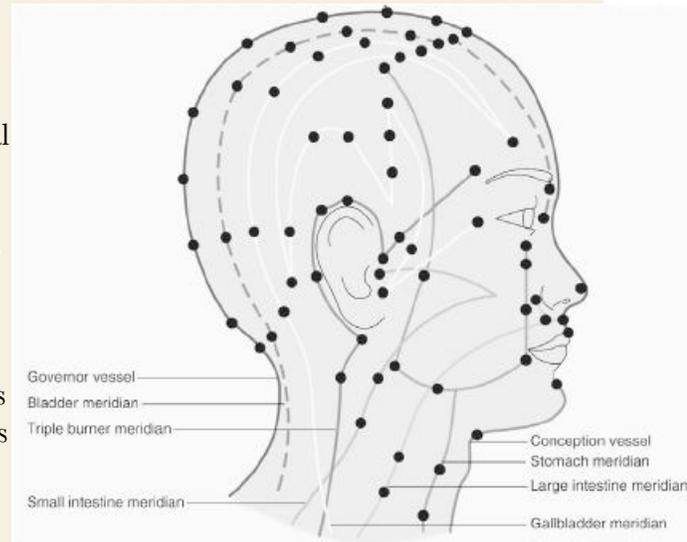
Chiropractic has also been given a bad rap due to some unskilled doctors and the media (notice what sound is made when someone's neck is broken in a film or TV show? The same sound when your neck is adjusted manually!). Chiropractic care isn't for everyone, but for those who love it, it is a needed adjunct to other care. There are different types of Chiropractic care, though two common ones are Manual or High Velocity ("bone cracking") and Activator Method (no movement, using a trigger tool). Both are effective modalities for different people, and you might find one works better than another for you. **GET SOFT TISSUE WORK BEFORE YOUR ADJUSTMENTS.** Some Chiropractors claim that you don't need massage (these are usually the ones who don't offer soft tissue work as part of their treatment) - this is false in my experience, as those who receive massage before an adjustment adjust easier, better, less painfully, and hold their adjustments for longer periods of time than those who don't. Make sure your Chiropractor is licensed!

ACUPUNCTURE

Acupuncture is a modality from Traditional Chinese medicine using special needles to stimulate energetic points along the body's energy meridians, or energy channels. The photo to the right of this column is a sample of the meridians in the neck and head (in white lines or black dashes) and common points on those meridians (black dots). Needles are placed just barely in the surface of the skin to either stimulate points, eliminate blockages of energy or shift energy elsewhere in the body. Moxibustion (burning herbs) or Fire Cupping (glass cups used to create suction) can also be used with needles as part of treatment. It is truly amazing what can be helped with acupuncture! Seek a state licensed Acupuncturist or a certified Practitioner of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

YOGA

Yoga is more of a full body discipline, and traditionally the term "Yoga" includes Patanjali's Eight Limbs of Yoga Philosophy



(Yoga Sutras), of which most of us here in the west (read: not India) practice only one limb: Hatha Yoga, or asana (posture) practice. A gentle yoga practice is great for most people (Kripalu, Yin, Ananda, or Restorative yoga styles), while more vigorous styles (Vinyasa, Kundalini, Core Strength Vinyasa, Ashtanga, Bikram, or Iyengar) are better suited for more active or more experienced individuals. Any combination of styles can suit, and it's up to the individual to find which style works best for you and the particular neck issues you are dealing with. Consult with a yoga teacher if you are unsure. Your chosen modality should be taught by a Yoga Teacher with a minimum 200 hour training in their modality.

KINESIOLOGY TAPING

The Kinesiology Taping is a definitive rehabilitative taping technique that is designed to facilitate the body's natural healing process while providing support and stability to muscles and joints without restricting the body's range of motion as well as providing extended soft tissue manipulation to prolong the benefits of manual therapy administered within the clinical setting. Latex-free and wearable for days at a time, kinesiology tape is safe for populations ranging from pediatric to geriatric, and successfully treats a variety of orthopedic, neuromuscular, neurological and other medical conditions. Kinesiology taping also rehabilitates the affected condition as well. By targeting different receptors within the somatosensory system, kinesiio tape alleviates pain and facilitates lymphatic drainage by microscopically lifting the skin. This lifting affect forms convolutions in the skin thus increasing interstitial space and allowing for a decrease in inflammation of the affected areas. Kinesiology tape and applications are available at most sporting goods stores now, and applications can also be found on YouTube. For best results, of course seek an experienced practitioner (Physical Therapist, Massage Therapist, Chiropractor, etc.) for

application as part of ongoing treatment.

OTHER MODALITIES

Modalities not mentioned in more detail here are no less effective - they are also as numerous as the stars in the sky! Try as many as possible to find the best combination of treatments that work for you.

SELF CARE EXERCISES FOR YOU

Once your playing posture has been evaluated and corrected if necessary, it's time for some self care! The following exercises are for the neck and shoulders - we're starting off closest to the trunk of the tree.

SHOULDER ROLLS

1. Start in a comfortable, seated position on the floor or in a firm chair (preferably with no arms), maintaining a relaxed, neutral spine (no slouching).
2. Breathe in deeply, and as you inhale raise your shoulders together up to your ears.
3. Exhale and draw the shoulders back and down to open the chest.
4. Repeat Steps 1-3 three to six times.

HEAD ROLLS

1. Still seated, breathe in and lengthen the spine towards the sky, straightening the neck.

2. As you exhale, slowly lower your chin to your chest **WITHOUT** hunching your shoulders. Stay chin to chest for a count of 10.
3. Inhale, and as you breathe in, roll the head gently onto the right shoulder. Continue to breathe deeply, and with every exhale relax the neck so it's as if your ear is going to touch your shoulder. Stay for 3-4 deep breaths.
4. On the next exhale slowly and gently roll your head down to your chest, then continue to roll onto the left shoulder. With every exhale, relax your neck - stay for 3-4 breaths.
5. On the next exhale, roll chin to chest slowly, and relax here for 3-4 breaths. On the inhale, bring the head up slowly, ending with the chin parallel to the ground.

PAINTBRUSH CIRCLES

1. Start in a comfortable seated position with a neutral (straight) spine.
2. Inhale, then exhale - with the exhale, slowly lower your head to your shoulder (ear to shoulder), as far as is comfortable.
3. With the head to one side, picture a small paintbrush on the top of your head, and begin moving the head in small, slow circles - as if you were painting circles on the wall.
4. Make 6-10 small rotations, then gradually increase to a larger rotation for another 6-10 rotations.
5. Come slowly to a stop, inhale the head slowly back up to neutral.
6. Repeat on the other side.

FREQUENCY IS THE KEY

While there are only three exercises here (to start with), what is important is to do them frequently - daily if you can, as a preventative, or at least before performing your respective instrument.

Pain is not a requirement for good playing!

Jackie Lewis is a New York State Licensed & Nationally Certified Massage Therapist, Certified Clinical Aromatherapist, and Certified Kripalu Yoga Teacher with her office in Georgia, VT.

She is also a Grade 1 Piper in good standing with the Eastern United States Pipe Band Association, and Pipe Sergeant and founding member of the Catamount Pipe Band Grade 4 in addition to prior experience in Grade 2 and Grade 1 bands in the United States.



Jackie Lewis