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Neck and shoulder pain are fairly common, with two-thirds of the Hong Kong population having neck and shoulder pain at some point in their lives. In particular those who have a hectic and stressful lifestyle, as well as a desk job that constantly have to use a computer, keeping their neck and shoulders in the same position, also people that have a bad posture or sleeping position.

What Causes Neck Pain?

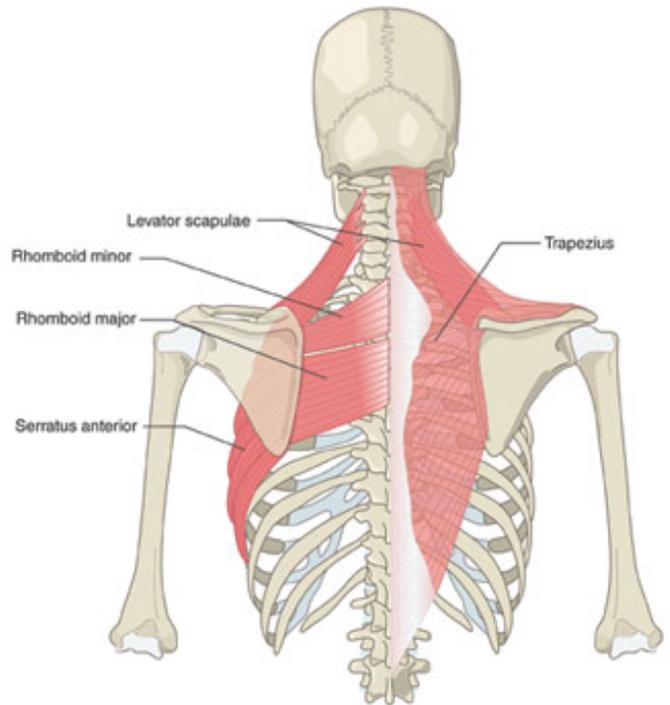
Types and causes of neck pain include:

- **Non-specific neck pain is the most common type.** This is sometimes called 'simple' or 'mechanical' neck pain. Often the exact cause or origin of the pain is not known. It may include minor strains and sprains to muscles or ligaments in the neck. Bad posture may also be a contributing factor in some cases. For example, neck pain is more common in people who spend much of their working day at a desk, with a 'bent-forward' posture.

- **Acute (sudden onset) torticollis.** This is sometimes called 'wry neck'. A torticollis is when the head becomes twisted to one side and it is very painful to move the head back straight. The cause of acute primary torticollis is often not known. However, it may be due to a minor strain or sprain to a muscle or ligament in the neck. Some cases may be due to certain muscles of the neck being exposed to cold ('sleeping in a draught'). It is common for people to go to bed feeling fine and to wake up the next morning with an acute torticollis.
- **Degeneration ('wear and tear')** of the spinal bones (vertebrae) and the 'discs' between the vertebrae is a common cause of recurring or persistent neck pain in older people. This is sometimes called cervical spondylosis. However, most people over the age of 50 have some degree of degeneration (spondylosis) without getting neck pain.

What are the symptoms of non-specific neck pain?

Pain develops in the neck and may spread to the shoulder or base of the skull. Movement of the neck feels restricted and moving the neck may make the pain worse. The pain sometimes spreads down an arm, sometimes as far as to the fingers. Sometimes, 'pins and needles' develop in part of the arm or hand. This is due to irritation of a nerve going to the arm from the spinal cord in the neck.



What Causes Shoulder Pain?

The shoulder is a ball and socket joint with a large range of movement. Such a mobile joint tends to be more susceptible to injury. Frozen shoulder and rotator cuff disorders are most common in middle-aged and older people.

Frozen shoulder, also known as adhesive capsulitis, is a painful, persistent stiffness of the shoulder joint, which makes it very difficult to carry out the full range of normal shoulder movements.

Frozen shoulder occurs when there is thickening, swelling and tightening of the flexible tissue that surrounds your shoulder joint. This leaves less space for your upper arm bone (humerus) in the shoulder joint and makes any movement stiff and painful. You may find it difficult to carry out everyday tasks, such as dressing, driving and sleeping comfortably. Some people are unable to move their shoulder at all. The symptoms of frozen shoulder can vary greatly from person to person, but they tend to advance slowly.

Rotator cuff disorders. The rotator cuff is the group of muscles and tendons that surround the shoulder joint. Tendons are the tough, rubbery cords that link muscles to bones. The rotator cuff keeps the joint in the correct position, allowing it to move in a controlled way.

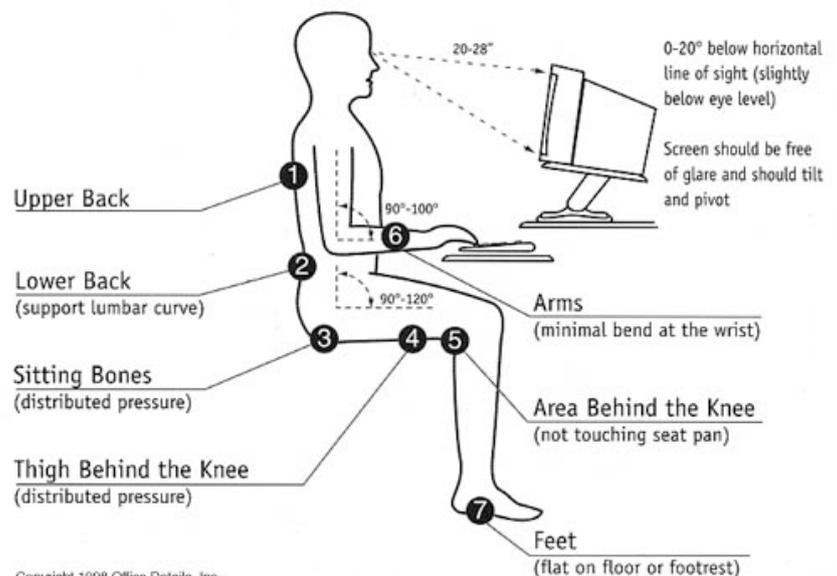
Common types of rotator cuff disorder can cause different symptoms

- pain that is worse during activities that involve your arm being above shoulder level – for example, when brushing your hair
- pain when you move your arm in an arc away from your body
- pain on the front and side of your shoulder
- pain at night

Shoulder instability occurs when the ball part of the shoulder joint does not move correctly in the socket. This can range from a slipping or ‘catching’ feeling in your shoulder, to full dislocation where the ball comes completely out of the socket. Shoulder instability is common among younger people, particularly in sports that involve repetitive shoulder movements, such as swinging in tennis and golf, also overarm bowling or throwing. Contact sports, such as rugby, where you may injure or fall on your shoulder.

Advice and treatment on Neck and Shoulder Pain

- **Neck and shoulders massage** combines elements of therapeutic and deep tissue massage to ease tension from your neck and shoulders. This massage can reduce the pain and spasms in muscles and have a noticeable improvement on joint flexibility.
- **Stretching and exercise your neck and shoulders to keep active.** Aim to keep your neck and shoulders moving as normally as possible. At first the pain may be quite bad, and you may need to rest for a day or so. However, gentle stretching and exercise as soon as you are able. You should not let it ‘stiffen up’. Gradually try to increase the range of the neck and shoulders movements.
- **A good posture may help.** Check that your sitting position at work or at the computer is not poor. (That is, not with your head flexed forward with a stooped back) Sit upright. Yoga can improve neck posture and can help in release the neck and shoulder pain.
- **A firm supporting pillow** seems to help some people when sleeping. Try not to use more than one pillow.



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