




# Diagnosing and Managing Neck Pain:

A Collaborative GP-Physiotherapist Approach



**!** General practitioners in Australia are consulted about neck pain approximately seven times a week on average.

 Watch this video for our physiotherapist's guide to diagnosing shoulder conditions.

## Understanding Complex Neck Pain Presentations

Patients presenting with neck pain often have symptoms arising from multiple contributing factors, including postural strain, joint dysfunction, and potential nerve involvement. Early identification of specific patterns, such as cervicogenic headaches or radicular symptoms, allows for tailored treatment that addresses both immediate symptoms and the underlying cause.

At our clinic, we collaborate with GPs to manage complex cases of neck pain, offering advanced physiotherapy to complement your care. Our approach focuses on functional recovery and long-term prevention.

## Clinical Presentation and Diagnostic Considerations

### Key Indicators to Note:

- 1 Headaches Associated with Sustained Postures Neck Movement**  
Suggestive of cervicogenic headaches from upper cervical dysfunction.
- 2 Restricted Cervical Range of Motion**  
Commonly affects rotation and extension, impacting functional activities like driving.
- 3 Radicular Symptoms**  
Pins and needles, numbness, or weakness in the arm may indicate nerve root involvement.
- 4 Postural or Activity-Dependent Pain**  
Sustained flexion, as seen in desk workers or teachers, can contribute to mechanical neck pain.

### Physical Examination Tips

- Assess Segmental Mobility:** Palpation can identify specific restrictions in the cervical spine.
- Screen for Radiculopathy:** Use Spurling's test, traction relief, and neurological assessments to confirm nerve root involvement.
- Functional Movement Testing:** Evaluate activities that provoke symptoms, such as driving or looking over the shoulder.

### Imaging Recommendations

- While most cases can be managed conservatively, imaging may be warranted in the following scenarios:
- Persistent radicular symptoms.
  - Progressive neurological deficits.
  - Significant functional limitations were unresponsive to initial treatment.



## Collaborative Management: Combining GP and Physiotherapist Expertise



### GP's Role

- Provide initial pain management with medications, such as NSAIDs, to improve patient tolerance for rehabilitation.
- Educate patients on posture, activity modification, and realistic recovery expectations.
- Refer to physiotherapy quickly for targeted, evidence-based interventions.



### Physiotherapy's Role

At our clinic, we provide targeted physiotherapy programs addressing the specific patient's individual needs with complex neck pain presentations. Our approach includes:

#### Early Manual Therapy

- Improved movement = improved pain. A variety of joint mobilisation techniques and soft tissue release to restore normal ROM. This unloads both the facet joints and discs to relieve cervical pain.
- Traction or segmental mobilisation for nerve root compression, alleviating radicular symptoms.

#### Individualised Exercise Program

- **Deep Cervical Flexor Training:** Progressive strengthening to restore neck stability and counteract sustained flexion strain.
- **Thoracic Mobility Exercises:** To enhance movement in adjacent spinal regions, reducing stress on the cervical spine.

- **Functional Strengthening:** Incorporate scapular stability exercises to support posture and improve load distribution.

#### Neuromuscular Retraining

- Proprioceptive drills such as joint position error correction to recalibrate cervical sensory input and improve head and neck control during tasks like reversing the car.

#### Headache Management

- Educate on posture adjustments and ergonomic modifications to reduce upper cervical spine load.
- Teach self-mobilisation techniques for ongoing headache prevention.

## The Benchmark Physiotherapy Advantage

At our clinic, we provide comprehensive care to support your patients' recovery, focusing on treating the source of their symptoms for lasting results.

### Why Refer to our clinic?

- **Advanced Care:** Evidence-based interventions tailored to each patient's unique needs.
- **Collaborative Communication:** Regular updates to keep you informed on progress and outcomes.
- **Holistic Approach:** We emphasise prevention through education, posture correction, and functional rehabilitation.

## Refer with Confidence

**Our treatment philosophy centres not only on reducing pain and regaining function but also to minimise recurrence.**

Our expert physiotherapy team works closely with patients to create a personalised rehabilitation plan designed to improve mobility, alleviate pain, and strengthen key muscle groups for long-term stability. Through advanced manual therapy, targeted exercise programs, and education on prevention strategies, we treat the source of the issue, not just the symptoms.

**Visit the Benchmark Physiotherapy General Practitioners Hub for more resources to empower your patient for better outcomes with physiotherapy.**

Contact us to find out more about how we can help your patients reach their potential.

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## References

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