

The Wellness Express™

Jump on the train to good health

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A Wry Neck Is Nothing to Laugh About

Presented by: Creative Healing

Have you ever experienced a kink in your neck that leaves your head tilted and painfully restricted when trying to turn it to one side? You probably had *torticollis*, or *wry neck*. This condition can be very painful.

Torticollis is a problem caused by a shortening of the sternocleidomastoid (SCM) muscle on one side of your neck. If you experience it, your head tilts toward the side of the tight muscle, with your chin pointing away from that side.

There are three main categories of torticollis:

1. Congenital
2. Spasmodic
3. Acquired

A child with torticollis at birth is considered to have the congenital version. This type is usually the result of a traumatic (and often assisted) birthing process. Although a limited number of cases of congenital torticollis are caused by serious spinal deformations or neurological disorders, sending every patient for x-rays would be excessive, according to some experts.¹ Instead, careful examination of the infant with torticollis, together with a thorough review of the birthing experience, will usually determine the cause.

Most often when an infant with congenital torticollis is brought to a chiropractic clinic, the chiropractor finds a palpable knot in the SCM muscle (called an SCM pseudotumor) on the same side as the head tilt. Chiropractic examination of the cervical spine and a range-of-motion assessment also typically reveal rotary subluxations of the upper two vertebrae. If one or both of these conditions exist, the infant is a good candidate for chiropractic care.

Exercise of the Week

Plank Position with One Foot on Ball

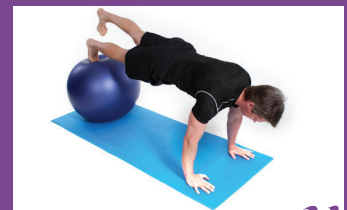
Difficulty: Moderate

(Consult your chiropractor before starting this or any other exercise.)

Start: Lie on ball, face down. Walk hands out to assume plank position with lower legs or feet on ball. The closer ball is to feet, the more difficult the exercise. Keep stomach tucked in and spine straight.

Exercise: Keeping abdominals contracted, and upper body still, lift one foot/leg straight up. Hold this finish position for 10-15 seconds. Switch legs. Hold for another 10-15 seconds. Place foot back on ball and walk hands back to rest position.

Repeat 2-3 times.



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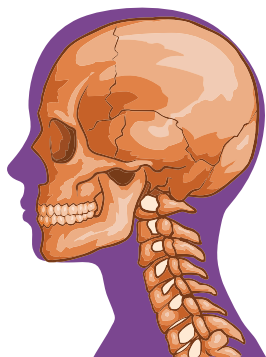
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Conservative treatment of congenital torticollis is usually quite successful.² Chiropractic adjustments of the neck as well as muscle manipulation and specific stretching exercises typically result in complete resolution of the symptoms within a few weeks.^{3,4} It is important to address these symptoms as soon as possible, otherwise long-term improper position of the head and neck can lead to cranial and facial distortions (plagiocephaly).

If congenital torticollis persists after a trial of conservative therapy lasting 2-4 weeks, the child should be further tested to rule out more serious problems. Other forms of treatment may include head and neck bracing, or surgery, to correct for an abnormally shortened and asymmetrical SCM muscle.

Adults Can Get Joint Torticollis too!

Adult-onset torticollis is usually classified as either spasmodic or acquired. If you have this condition, sometimes your head and neck are not stuck in the same position, but instead the muscles tend to spasm, leading to the occurrence of tremors or shakiness with head movements. In this case, chiropractic care has also been shown to be helpful in reducing symptoms.⁵



The most common form of torticollis is the acquired type, which affects a large number of older children and adults. Although the symptoms are the same as the congenital version, acquired torticollis typically follows acute trauma or strain in the neck region. Whiplash from a motor vehicle accident is one example of neck trauma leading to torticollis.




Treatment for acquired torticollis is similar to that prescribed for the other types.

Your chiropractor will adjust the areas of cervical subluxations, followed by soft tissue therapy for the tight and painful SCM or trapezius muscles. Although treatments often provide relief within a few days, it is important to consider ongoing chiropractic care after experiencing any form of neck trauma. It is common for chronic neck pain to develop following acute injury, and chiropractic can help prevent many of these problems from occurring.

Chiropractic care should be your number one choice for any musculoskeletal condition involving neck pain or alignment – especially torticollis!

Quote to Inspire



“Do not undervalue the headache. While it is at its sharpest it seems a bad investment; but when relief begins, the unexpired remainder is worth \$4 a minute.”

- Mark Twain

References and sources:

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4. Toto BJ. Chiropractic correction of congenital muscular torticollis - *J Manipulative Physiol Ther.* 1993; 16: 556-559
5. Reduction of cervical dystonia after an extended course of chiropractic manipulation: a case report - *J Manipulative Physiol Ther.* 2004 Jul-Aug; 27(6): 421-6.

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