

Cervical Spondylosis



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It is worth mentioning here that cervical spondylosis is not a disease as such. Rather it is a degeneration process occurring in the neck bones as age progresses. It is only when the person has pain in the neck, arm, shoulder, front of chest or back of chest, because of degeneration of neck bones, patient is labeled to be having cervical spondylosis.

There are seven vertebral bones in the neck. After the age of about 40 to 45 yrs, about 80% of persons start having degeneration of spine (as happens in many other parts of the body like wrinkling of skin, degeneration of the knee joints).

Changes in neck bones is more common in men, especially urban people who have upright posture most of the time and don't do exercises. Rural people have less incidence.

What actually happens in degeneration is that, water content of cartilages and discs (cushions between vertebra) decreases and there are bony outgrowths. These cause decreased movements of spine (causing localized pain) and press the nerves (leading on to pain in arm or chest).

In younger patients neck pain is usually not due to cervical spondylosis. Rather there are other causes like weakness or strain of muscles due to misuse of neck. It may also happen due to prolapse of disc in neck bones.

These days many young persons, involved in IT profession, complain of neck pain, which may radiate to the arm as well. This is because they are overworked and are not able to maintain good posture of neck. Many students who study in improper posture, are affected by neck pain.

Clinical Features-

- 1) Patients suffering from cervical spondylosis may have pain in neck, back of the head, arm, front and back of chest.
- 2) They may also have tingling sensation in fingers or hand.
- 3) There can be weakness of the grip power of hand.
- 4) Some patients may have giddiness (when blood supply to brain decreases due movements of the neck).
- 5) In very old patients, the compression of the spinal cord may lead to the weakness of all the four limbs with imbalance while walking.
- 6) Younger persons working on computers or at similar places, may complain of pain in neck or arm, after working for short durations and have to get up from the chair.

Investigations-

X-ray is the most common investigation. It shows signs of degeneration. In younger patients x-rays may be normal.

After the age of 40 yrs, x-rays of normal persons may also show findings of degeneration and report may be labelled as cervical spondylosis, but the person must consult a doctor so as to know whether he really has cervical spondylosis or these x-ray findings are of no significance.

Other investigations are advanced ones and are advised only if the patient does not improve or deteriorates with treatment. These include MRI, nerve conduction studies and CT scan.

Treatment-

Treatment should always be started after consulting a doctor especially an ortho surgeon. Ignoring the treatment or getting treated from an unqualified person is not advisable, as in this way, some serious disease may be missed.

Basic treatment includes the use of soft neck collar for short duration and some pain killers along with muscle relaxants.

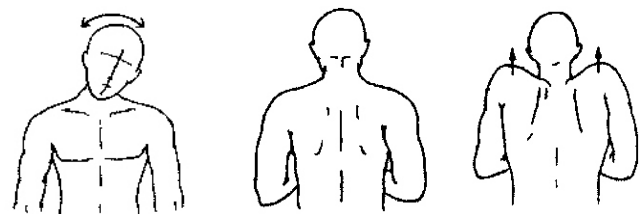
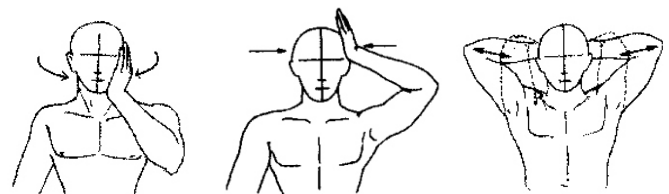
In addition physiotherapy may be started, it may be in the form of intermittent traction, ultrasonic therapy or interferential therapy to be instituted by a qualified physiotherapist.

Once there is a typical attack of cervical spondylosis, in which there is stiff neck with pain in neck with radiation to arm, with tingling in fingers, inspite of all the treatments, it takes about 2-3 weeks for patients to recover.

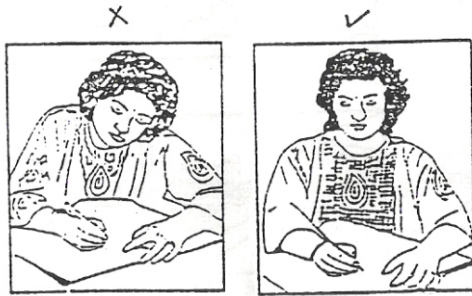
If there is no improvement or deterioration, then further investigations may be done and a neurosurgeon may be consulted.

Once the acute attack is over, the patient is advised to do regular exercises. Main stress is laid on preventive aspects. These include

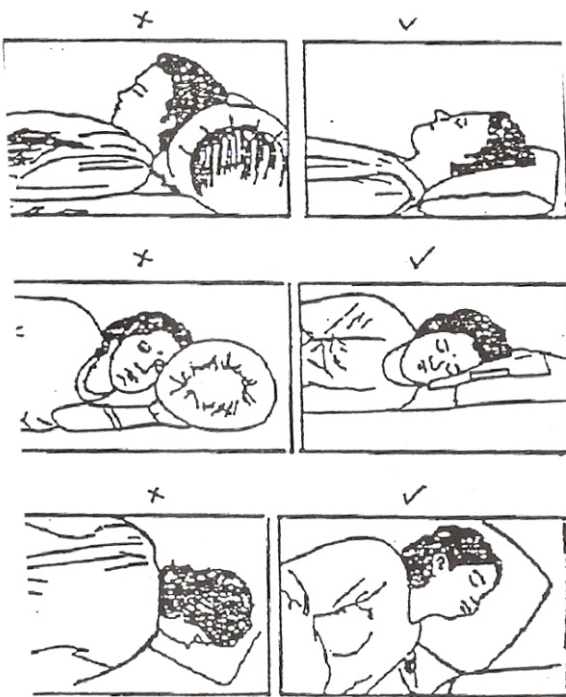
-Regular exercises, done properly as advised by an ortho surgeon or a physiotherapist.



Correct posture especially for those who work for long hours.



Good sleeping habits including proper use of pillow



Consult a doctor in case of acute attack and take rest.

As far as IT professionals are concerned, they should be guided by their employers so as to reduce the loss of manhours.

After every 2-3 hrs, one should get up from the chair and do some muscle toning exercises

Level of the monitor of computer and eyes should be same

While using keyboard the part of upper limbs between elbow and wrists should be supported on the table

The department should have a gymnasium for exercises to be used by the employees at free times.

Some Myths-

- 1) It is a myth that neck pain is always due to cervical spondylosis. It may be due other causes also like infection, malignancy or injury
- 2) It is a myth that those who have cervical spondylosis should not use a pillow. It depends on sleeping habits. If the person sleeps most of the time straight on bed, then a thin pillow should be used. If one has the habit of sleeping on side then a normal good sized pillow should be used so as to fill the space between head and bed.
- 3) If x-ray of neck is done for some other purpose and it shows changes of cervical spondylosis, then there is nothing to get panicky as the changes are seen in normal persons also.
- 4) It is a myth that giddiness is always due to cervical spondylosis. In case of giddiness, one must consult a physician, ortho surgeon or a neurologist, if possible, to rule out any other disease.
- 5) It is a myth that one has to always use a collar if he has cervical spondylosis. A collar should be used for short durations during an acute attack, otherwise it can cause weakness of neck muscles.

Facts-

- 1) It is a fact that cervical spondylosis in very elderly people can lead to paralysis of all the four limbs, specially it may be triggered by an injury.
- 2) Regular exercises, a good posture and good sleeping habits can avoid neck pain due to cervical spondylosis for long durations.
- 3) Cervical traction should not be given to patients having neck pain due to infection/tumor.
- 4) Sometimes, cervical traction may increase pain even in cervical spondylosis. So it is advisable to get cervical traction carefully for the first time.

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