



NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S
When your child needs a hospital, everything matters.™

Helping Hand™

Health Education for Patients and Families

Sports Medicine: Cervical Strain and Sprain

A cervical strain or sprain is an injury to the muscles or ligaments in the back of the neck.

Signs and symptoms

- unable to move the neck comfortably or limited motion of the neck
- muscle spasm with soreness and stiffness in the neck and shoulders
- pain or stiffness in neck
- tenderness and sometimes swelling at the injury site

Increased risk

- poor neck conditioning (flexibility and strength)
- poor posture
- previous neck injury
- poorly fitted equipment
- situations that make accidents more likely or direct trauma
- poor tackling technique using head (spearing), head-butting, or landing on top of the head
- high-risk sports (football, rugby, wrestling, hockey, gymnastics, diving, karate, boxing)

Treatment

- Medicine
 - Anti-inflammatory medicines, such as ibuprofen (Motrin® or Advil®) or naproxen (Aleve®) may be recommended. Take these as directed by your health care provider.
 - Other minor pain relievers, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®)
- Use of cold and heat
 - Cold should be applied for 10 to 15 minutes every 2 to 3 hours for swelling and after any activity that makes symptoms worse. Use ice packs or an ice massage.

- Heat may be used 48 to 72 hours after injury and then may be used before performing stretching and strengthening activities prescribed by your health care provider or athletic trainer. Use a heat pack, warm soak or hot shower. Apply for 10 to 15 minutes.
- Rehab
 - Rehab may be needed to decrease pain, regain motion and strength and to help return to sports.
 - Your health care provider may recommend a licensed massage therapist, especially if you have muscle spasms.
- Cervical collar
 - If symptoms are severe, a soft, padded, fabric or hard plastic cervical collar may be recommended until the pain goes away.

How to prevent

- Maintain suitable conditioning, including neck and shoulder strength and flexibility.
- Do correct warm-up and stretching before practice or competition.
- Wear proper fitted protective equipment.
- Avoid tackling with the head, spearing and head butting.
- Use proper falling technique to avoid landing on the head.

When to call the health care provider

Call your health care provider or the **Sports Medicine team** at **614-355-6000** if:

- symptoms get worse after 2 weeks, even with treatment
- new, unexplained symptoms develop

**To schedule an appointment
with Sports Medicine, visit
[NationwideChildrens.org/Sports
MedicineScheduling](https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/sports-medicine-scheduling) or scan this
code with your camera phone.**

