Thoracic Outlet Syndrome

Thoracic outlet syndrome is a condition caused by the compressing of the nerves and blood vessels between the muscles of the neck and the shoulders. Work activities involving prolonged restricted postures such as carrying heavy shoulder loads, pulling shoulders back and down, or reaching above shoulder level for prolonged periods of time can cause the *inflammation* (soreness) and swelling of *tendons* (cord like structures which attach muscle to bone) and muscles in the shoulders and upper arms. When swollen or inflamed, they can compress the nerves and blood vessels between the neck and shoulders.

SYMPTOMS

- Pain
- Arm weakness
- Numbness in the arm and fingers
- Sense of touch or the ability to feel heat and cold may be lost

DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis is made by medical history and physical examination. Special tests can confirm the diagnosis.

TREATMENT

- A carefully planned program of exercise therapy.
- Applying ice packs for 15 to 20 minutes four times per day may be useful.
- Avoid work activities suspected of causing the condition.
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.
- Surgery may be necessary if symptoms persist.

PREVENTION

- Avoid carrying heavy weights.
- Avoid reaching overhead.
- Avoid lifting with the arms above shoulder level.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have an increase in swelling or pain in your arm.
- You notice coldness in your fingers.
- Pain relief is not obtained with medications.

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