Torticollis, Acute (Wry Neck)

You have suddenly (*acutely*) developed a twisted neck (*torticollis*). This is usually a self-limited condition.

CAUSES

Acute torticollis may be caused by malposition, trauma or infection. Most commonly, acute torticollis is caused by sleeping in an awkward position. Torticollis may also be caused by the flexion, extension or twisting of the neck muscles beyond their normal position. Sometimes, the exact cause may not be known.

SYMPTOMS

Usually, there is pain and limited movement of the neck. Your neck may twist to one side.

DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis is often made by physical examination. X-rays, CT scans or MRIs may be done if there is a history of trauma or concern of infection.

TREATMENT

For a common, stiff neck that develops during sleep, treatment is focused on relaxing the contracted neck muscle. Medications (including shots) may be used to treat the problem. Most cases resolve in several days. Torticollis usually responds to conservative physical therapy. If left untreated, the shortened and spastic neck muscle can cause deformities in the face and neck. Rarely, surgery is required.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Use over-the-counter and prescription medications as directed by your caregiver.
- Do stretching exercises and massage the neck as directed by your caregiver.
- Follow up with physical therapy if needed and as directed by your caregiver.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You develop difficulty breathing or noisy breathing (*stridor*).
- You drool, develop trouble swallowing or have pain with swallowing.
- You develop numbness or weakness in the hands or feet.
- You have changes in speech or vision.
- You have problems with urination or bowel movements.
- You have difficulty walking.
- You have an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C), not controlled by medicine.
- You have increased pain.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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