

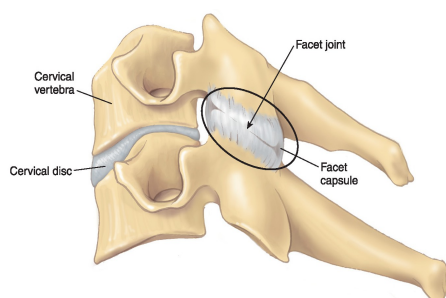
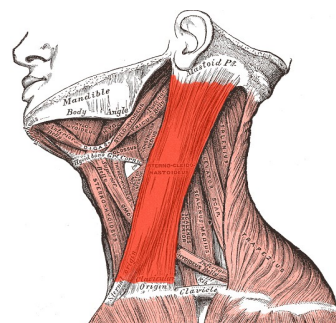
# ACUTE WRY NECK

## What is a 'wry neck'?

A 'wry neck' is a condition that most people have experienced at some stage in their life. It is characterised by a sudden occurrence of pain in the neck, usually on one side, that limits movement of the neck in one or more directions. It is associated with involuntary muscle spasm in the neck and shoulder muscles. The most common experience for an acute wry neck is waking one morning and feeling as though you are unable to turn your head to one side due to pain and stiffness. It can also occur following sudden or jerky movement. The severity of the pain and movement limitation can vary from mild to quite excruciating.

## What causes a wry neck?

The cause of a wry neck can vary. In babies and infants it is often known as a *torticollis*, usually due to tightness or spasm of the *sternocleidomastoid* muscle (pictured right). This often occurs from habitual posturing or sleeping postures which cause the muscles to shorten in one direction. This is best treated by a physiotherapist and the parents by improved posturing, gentle stretching & massage, as well as modifying the baby/infants environment to encourage movement into the effected direction.



In youth and adults it is widely accepted that there are two main origins for an acute wry neck, either a facet (the joint between 2 vertebrae) wry neck or a diskogenic (the disc between 2 vertebrae) wry neck. There are generally no complications or long term effects, it can either be a one-off occurrence or something that happens from time to time. In most cases a wry neck is a very temporary and self limiting condition that resolves in 4-10 days. This process can be hastened through 1 or 2 treatments by a physiotherapist. Treatment often involves mobilisation or manipulation of spinal segments, soft tissue massage, postural retraining and motor control exercises.

## How do I know it is a wry neck?

If it is a first time occurrence or a severe case of neck pain it is advisable to see a qualified physiotherapist to safely and accurately diagnose the specific problem, since not all neck pain is a wry neck. There are several potential sources of neck pain and stiffness including:

- cervical disc injury
- postural overloading
- degenerative changes
- whiplash associated disorders
- spinal fractures
- nerve root pain

The management and recovery time frame can vary significantly depending on the diagnosis. Your physiotherapist will assess you and advise you as to the best course of action. In some cases it may require a referral to a GP in order to have imaging investigation.

This resource is provided by Proactive Physiotherapy Ph: 40536222

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