McKenzie’s Exercises for a Pinched Nerve in the Neck

Overview

The McKenzie neck exercises are designed to abolish neck pain from a pinched nerve and restore normal neck function. Robin McKenzie, a postural expert, developed a series of simple positional exercises for neck and back pain. Nerve impingement in the neck and upper back can radiate symptoms from the neck into the shoulders, arms and hands. The primary aim of these non-resistance exercises is the centralization of pain, which is the movement of pain from the extremity to a location closer to the spine, since neck pain is generally tolerated better than extremity pain.

Lumbar Support

The first step in correcting poor neck posture and lessening nerve impingement is to provide support to the low back while sitting. Use a lumbar support to place the lower and middle back in proper posture, thus placing the neck in a position of greater alignment with the spine and ribcage. This lessens the possibility of maintaining an incorrect posture of forward carriage of the head and placing additional stress on the neck muscles and joints.

Seated Cervical Retractions

Sit up straight with your head facing straight ahead, not flexed downward, extended backward, tilted right or left or rotated right or left. Tuck your chin and push your head straight backward to the maximum possible degree. Hold for a few seconds, then apply overpressure by pushing your chin backward with both hands. Hold this position for a few more seconds. Repeat this motion 10 times per session, and perform six to eight sessions throughout the day. If this exercise lessens or centralizes the pain proceed to the next exercise.

Seated Cervical Extensions

This exercise should always follow seated cervical retractions. Perform a few seated cervical retractions, hold the retracted position and extend your head backward to the greatest possible degree. In a rhythmical, not too slow, motion rotate your neck a half-inch to the right of center, then a half-inch to the left of center. Execute 10 reps per session, and perform six to eight sessions daily. If the pain centralizes proceed to the next exercise.

Supine Cervical Retractions

Always perform this exercise after seated cervical retractions and seated cervical extensions. Lie face-up with your head and spine supported on a firm training table, bed or couch. Hold your neck and head facing straight ahead, not flexed down, extended upward, tilted right or left, or rotated right or left. Tuck your chin and push your head straight backward into the table. Hold for a few seconds, then apply slight overpressure by pushing your chin with both hands toward the table and hold for a few additional seconds. Perform 10 repetitions.

References

- "Treat Your Own Neck”; McKenzie; 1997

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