



# Acute torticollis (wry neck)

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**You have been diagnosed in the Emergency Department with torticollis.  
This leaflet explains how this condition is managed.**

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## What is acute torticollis?

Torticollis is a twisted neck in which the head is tipped to one side, while the chin is turned to the other. This occurs when the muscles supporting the neck go into spasm. It is a common cause of neck pain in young people.

'Acute' means that the symptoms have developed quickly, over a period of hours or often overnight. It is not unusual for someone to go to bed at night feeling fine and then wake up with an acute torticollis.

The cause is often not known, and it can happen in people with no previous neck problems however a minor muscle injury or sprain can be caused by:

- Sitting or sleeping in an unusual position without neck support
- Poor posture while looking at a computer screen
- Carrying heavy / unbalanced loads

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms include: limited range of motion of the head, headache, head tremor, neck pain, shoulder is higher on one side of the body, stiffness of neck muscles and swelling of the neck muscles.

## How is it diagnosed?

The diagnosis is often made by physical examination. X-rays are usually not needed unless the physical exam fails to reveal the exact cause of the problem.

## What is the treatment?

Symptoms will usually get better on their own after a few days but will sometimes take a little longer. The aims of treatment are to reduce pain and muscle stiffness.

Gentle neck exercises are usually advised and simple painkillers may help to enable this. Heat packs will often help with the muscle stiffness. Good posture may help to prevent recurrence.

## What to look out for

Seek further medical advice from your GP if you experience:

- Numbness or weakness in the hands or feet.
- Severe pain or pain that radiates down the arm or into the hand.
- Pain is not improving after a few days.

## **Tell us your views**

If you wish to discuss any aspect of your treatment and care, please speak to a senior member of staff or to the nurse looking after you. The matrons are also available during normal working hours and they welcome your views.

You can also pick up a copy of the Trust leaflet called 'Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)' which explains how you can raise concerns or give feedback on your experience at the hospital

## **Friends and Family Test**

Whatever your experience you can give feedback by answering the Friends & Family test question – 'Overall, how was your experience of our service?' – by going online [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/friends-and-family-test/](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/friends-and-family-test/) or using the link sent to you in an SMS text message.

To find out more about our Trust visit [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

**Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.**

RBFT Emergency Department, June 2024

Next review due: June 2026