

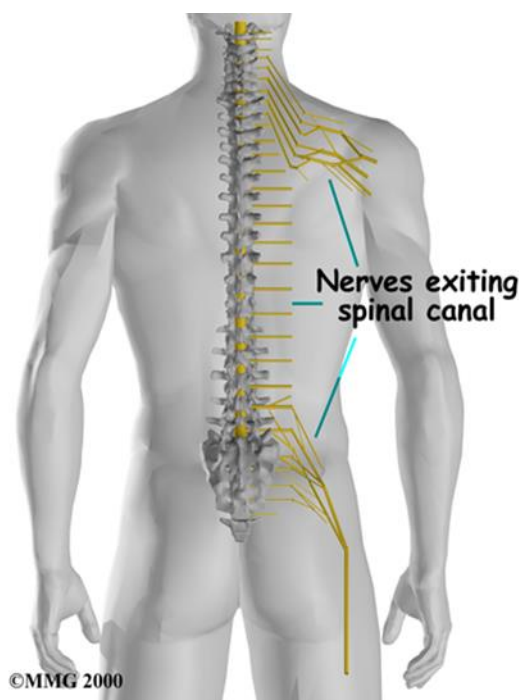
Cervical Nerve Root Pain

What is nerve root pain?

Nerve root pain stems from irritation of a nerve in your neck. It is often described as burning or shooting in nature and can also be associated with pins and needles, numbness or weakness in your arm and/or hand. At times it may be accompanied by neck pain or headaches, although not always. Where exactly you feel your arm pain depends on which nerve root has been irritated. This condition is referred to as a cervical radiculopathy.

What causes it?

Our nerves exit the neck through small bony holes at each side of the spine. Normal age related changes such as enlarged spinal joints, a loss of disc height and thickened ligaments can all lead to irritation of the nerve tissue as it leaves the spine. Sometimes this causes pain. Conditions such as diabetes may mean that you are at an increased risk of developing symptoms.



How long does it last?

Approximately 8 out of 10 people will find that their symptoms subside within 10 – 12 weeks of onset. In a small minority of cases some symptoms may persist for up to eighteen months. Symptoms of numbness or weakness may last longer than that of pain. The symptoms can be very unpleasant, although it is important to note that the pain you experience does not mean that ongoing harm is being done.

What can I do?

It is important to remain as active as you are able. All guidelines on spinal pain emphasise the importance of continuing with daily activities. Avoiding particular activities due to a fear of causing further harm may mean that your nerve pain will take longer to settle. Don't worry if you have small flare-ups in your pain levels. This can be quite normal during the healing process.



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What treatments are available to me?

In the first instance you should visit your GP for assessment. They will provide you with appropriate pain relief to allow you to keep moving. Sometimes they will prescribe a type of medication that reduces the sensitivity of the nerve affected in addition to, or instead of regular analgesia and anti-inflammatories. Pain relief is most effective when taken at regular intervals and at the prescribed dose. If your pain is not settling then your GP may refer you to a physiotherapist or spinal specialist. Very occasionally a spinal injection and/or an operation may be considered, but generally your body needs to be given an opportunity to heal on its own first.

Remember

You can be reassured that nerve root pain is rarely due to anything serious. However if you have severe arm pain (with or without neck pain) which worsens over several weeks, you are unwell with your arm pain, or develop loss of manual dexterity then you should see your doctor.

If you have neck and/or arm pain and develop any of the symptoms below, you should go to A&E immediately:

- Significant weakness in one or both arms.
- Increasing nerve root pain in both arms at the same time.
- Unsteadiness on your feet.

This factsheet has been written to help you understand more about your nerve root pain. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice and should be used in conjunction with verbal information and treatment given in our physiotherapy department.



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