



Musculoskeletal

Interventions to prevent neck pain

What is the effectiveness of interventions that aim to prevent a new episode of neck pain?

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Neck pain is common. Around half of the world's population will experience neck pain at some point in their life. Being able to prevent a future episode of neck pain would be a valuable thing.

A group of academic physiotherapists from Sydney, Australia, recently scoured published research to identify evidence about interventions to prevent a new episode of neck pain. Their findings are intriguing.

One might expect that an ergonomic review of your workspace would help. Ergonomic evaluations can include adjustment of your workstation, ergonomic redesign or modification, evaluation of participant posture while performing daily tasks, manual handling aids, and even job rotation.

Despite finding a substantial amount of evidence examining the effects of ergonomic intervention, the news was not good. When the results of these studies were pooled statistically, there was no overall effect. No benefit, no harm. None of the individual studies identified any benefit.

In contrast, exercise programs do seem to be helpful for preventing neck pain. 2 trials were identified during the review of published research. One of these trials tested an exercise program involving stretching exercises and endurance exercises for the neck muscles. This halved the risk of a new episode of neck pain, which was a fairly precise estimate.

The other study examined aerobic exercise and supplemented it with health information, stress management training and a practical examination of the work place. Although the best estimate from this study was that the effect was even more favourable, it was quite an imprecise (or uncertain) estimate.

When the results of these 2 studies were pooled, the overall result was a statistically significant reduction in the risk of a future episode of neck pain by about half.

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