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Does Stress Cause Neck Pain?

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Does stress cause neck pain? The short answer is no! At Boulet Physical Therapy, we like to say "contributes to" instead of "cause." The casual way healthcare professionals throw around terms can lead to confusion and, worse still, ineffective treatment. Fortunately, our highly skilled therapists know how to dig deep and find the root cause of your neck pain, and this information helps you find relief!

Let's discuss Nicole, a 40-something-year-old working mother of three. Nicole was used to being very active, balancing her work schedule with getting her kids to all the various activities and school functions that come with being a mom nowadays. Her neck pain first started as a crick in the neck when she woke up one morning. As the day progressed from driving her kids around to sitting at her desk, she noticed turning her head became more difficult and painful, making focusing on work nearly impossible.

Nicole struggled to figure out why her neck started hurting and came to the conclusion that stress "must be" the culprit. The more pain and difficulty moving she had, the more convinced she was that stress was to blame.

Understanding Nicole's Neck Pain

One of the most common things we hear from our patients is that their pain started for "no apparent reason." Like Nicole, people will wake up with a crick in their neck or notice a stiffness turning when driving in the car. It is also common for people to notice tightness in their upper back and neck after a long day. So, what is actually the source of the pain? In most cases, there is an issue with the neck joints or the neck muscles due to prolonged positions. Our neck joints don't like remaining in any position for extended periods. In Nicole's case, she first noticed her pain in the morning, which may have been related to her neck position while sleeping. It is also important to note that in Nicole's case, the first sign of any issue was in the morning when she woke up, unrelated to stress.

As Nicole's day progressed, her pain got worse. But this also was more likely related to how she held her neck while driving or sitting at her computer. In both cases, her posture, specifically how she held her neck, seems to have contributed to her pain. Prolonged sitting can lead to a forward head position, resulting in tension to soft tissue (i.e., muscles, tendons, and ligaments) or negative changes to our blood flow.

The muscles of our neck function best when we move them. So, holding her head in one position likely led to irritation of the muscles and affected her ability to move her neck, which in turn caused stress.



Stress "contributes" to neck pain because, when we experience stress, our bodies naturally respond by tensing up as a protective measure. This tension can lead to discomfort, particularly in the neck and upper back region. Research studies have found that individuals with higher stress levels reported increased neck pain as compared to those with lower stress levels. This is why we say "contributes" to, but not the cause of, neck pain.

How Physical Therapy Can Help Alleviate Neck Pain

We will target the source of your pain by performing a thorough examination, starting with your medical history and details about how, when, and where your symptoms began. As we saw with Nicole, determining how, when, and why the pain started helps us eliminate possibilities and get to the actual root cause(s).

Our therapists will also analyze your posture and movement to identify any limitations or restrictions contributing to your condition. We'll use this information to design a program that addresses your specific needs.

Our treatment plans focus on relieving your pain and improving your posture, mobility, strength, etc., and educating you about managing your symptoms. Your program will likely include manual therapy (i.e., soft tissue work and/or joint mobilizations), targeted stretches, exercises, activity modification, or posture recommendations.

We'll listen to your unique situation and specific issues and then work to help you find relief and get back to your normal routine.

Book Your Appointment Today!

If you're dealing with neck pain or looking for someone to help you figure out what is causing your issues, call us today and set up a consultation!

Sources: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1836955320301417?via%3Dihub> · <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36180150/> · <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2270377/> · <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28972599/>

Separating Muscle and Joint Pain: The Key to Lasting Results

Do you notice tightness in your upper back and neck? Is it more tight on one side than that on the other? The location and characteristics of your neck pain are valuable clues for our skilled therapists at Boulet Physical Therapy to identify the likely culprit for your pain, which helps us guide you to lasting relief. Ready to unlock the secret to lasting relief from neck and upper back pain? Don't ignore those subtle signs — reach out to our skilled therapists today, and let us help you resolve your pain once and for all!

Neck Pain — Muscle vs. Joint

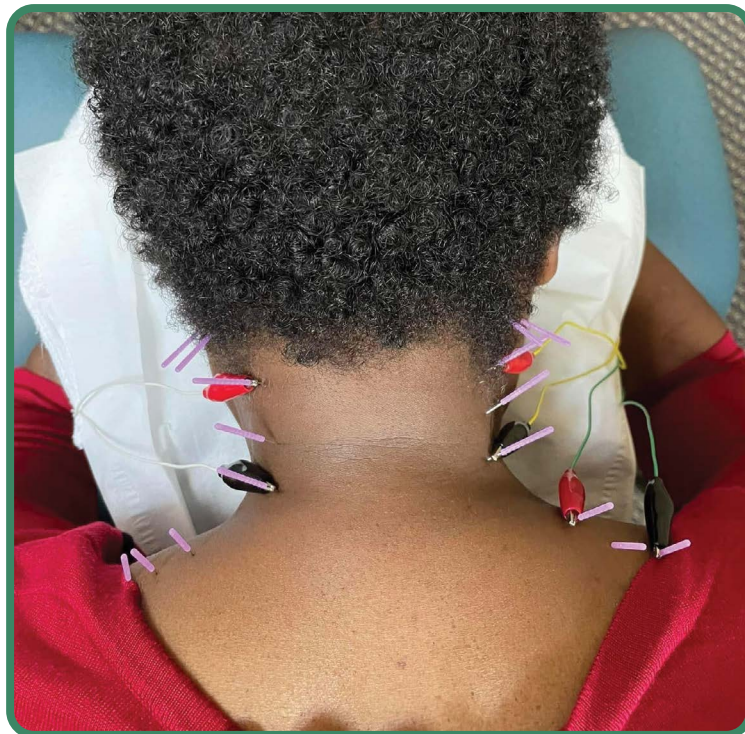
It can be difficult for people to determine where their pain originates. One of the most common reasons people describe their pain is “no apparent reason.” It often seems to come out of the blue or while doing the same everyday things you usually do.

You can use these clues to point you in the right direction:

- **Pain on one side = joint pain.** Although this, and all other clues, is not 100% true, it is a good starting point. Muscle tension tends to be equally distributed, whereas joint pain is typically one-sided.
- **Difficulty or inability to turn = joint dysfunction.** Muscle tension tends to make movement uncomfortable or to feel tight on the opposite side of where you're turning towards (pain on the left when turning right). Joint dysfunction usually causes the inability to turn or the sensation of a blockage when turning to the same side as the pain (pain on the right when turning right).

- **Pain that travels = joint.** Muscles tend to feel tight and sore in the muscles themselves, compared to joint pain, which travels from the source of pain up into the head or down into the shoulder and arm.

These clues can help us determine what is causing your pain, but the best way to get lasting relief is to schedule an appointment with one of our therapists!



Healthy Recipe: Vegetarian Fajitas

Ingredients:

- 2 tsp chili powder
- 1 tsp cumin
- ½ tsp garlic powder
- ½ tsp onion powder
- ½ tsp smoked paprika
- Pinch of cayenne pepper
- 1 tsp kosher salt
- ¼ tsp black pepper
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 green bell pepper, sliced
- 1 red bell pepper, sliced
- 1 yellow bell pepper, sliced
- 1 medium red onion, sliced
- 8 oz mushrooms, sliced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tbsp fresh lime juice
- Tortillas, corn or flour

Directions: In a small bowl, combine the chili powder, cumin, garlic powder, onion powder, smoked paprika, cayenne pepper, salt and pepper. In a large cast iron skillet, heat the oil over medium-high heat. Add the peppers, onion, and mushrooms and stir until the veggies are coated in the oil. Add the fajita seasoning and cook for 5 minutes, stirring frequently. Stir in the garlic and lime juice and cook for 2 minutes. The vegetables should be tender but still slightly crisp. Serve the veggie fajita filling with tortillas and desired toppings such as guacamole, salsa, shredded cheese or sour cream.



Service Spotlight: TMJ Therapy

Are you having difficulty chewing or yawning? Do you have jaw pain? Do you hear a clicking noise when you open and shut your mouth? If so, these may all be symptoms of TMJ dysfunction. Temporomandibular joint dysfunction, also known as TMJ dysfunction, is a condition that causes pain and stiffness of the jaw joint and its surrounding muscles. This can make it very difficult to open your mouth, talk, yawn, and chew.

The temporomandibular joint connects the jaw to the skull. If there is an injury to this joint or it becomes damaged in any way, TMJ dysfunction may develop. It's important to realize that the temporomandibular joint is a complex and important structure comprised of bones, tendons, and muscles that may cause you to feel pain on one or both sides of the jaw. If you are suffering from TMJ dysfunction, or you think you might be, contact Boulet Physical Therapy & Wellness Institute today to schedule an appointment and find relief.

How Is Tmj Dysfunction Diagnosed?

There is no single method or surefire way of diagnosing TMJ dysfunction. If you believe you may be suffering from this condition, a medical professional will analyze your medical history and perform a physical exam. Your physician may also send you to an otolaryngologist or a dentist specializing in jaw disorders. The idea is to rule out other medical problems before diagnosing the patient with TMJ dysfunction, as the symptoms may also be due to a condition known as trigeminal neuralgia, salivary gland disease, or even swollen lymph nodes. Once your diagnosis has been determined, you will be treated based on the nature of your symptoms. Symptoms of this TMJ dysfunction include pain in the jaw, jaw popping, headaches, sore jaw muscles, locking of the jaw, pain in the temple, and earaches. There are many reasons why TMJ dysfunction may develop, but some common causes include misalignment of the teeth, gum chewing, arthritis, teeth grinding, or a jaw injury.

Call 337.223.4622 for TMJ relief!

Patient Success Spotlight



"I loved my experience at Boulet Physical Therapy! Everyone on the staff was so nice and helpful. Dr. Kathryn was great and helped me go from having pain everyday, to having practically none. She taught me exercises and I am now able to manage on my own!"

— G.G.

Call 337.223.4622 Today!

KNOW SOMEONE WHO COULD USE OUR HELP?

If a loved one you know is struggling with aches and pains, don't hesitate to refer them to Boulet Physical Therapy today! We can help them get to the bottom of their discomfort.



Spread The Love!

Would you take a moment to share your Boulet PT experience on our Google Review page? We make it easy: just scan this QR code with your phone's camera.



Call Boulet Today



337.223.4622