

Neck pain is a very common problem and is a major cause of disability around the world. In North America one in ten people experience significant neck pain. One in twenty experience pain that is severe enough to result in disability.

For over seven years, 50 health researchers from 9 different countries have been investigating all of the different methods of treating neck pain. To assist in the investigation, a grading system was used to classify the different degrees and types of neck pain. Grade 1 included mild neck pain with little or no interference with daily activity. Grade 2 is more significant neck pain that did limit normal daily activities. Grade 3 involved not only pain in the neck, but also radiculopathy, which refers to nerve involvement. Exiting between the bones of the lower neck are the nerves that supply the arms and hands. Many neck problems pinch or irritate these nerves which can cause pain, numbness or weakness into the arm. Grade 4 involved serious pathology such as fractures, cancer and tumors.

Most patients who suffer with neck pain are in the grade 1 and 2 categories. Quite a few can be found in category 3 and rarely in category 4. Through 17 years of practice, I have only seen a few category 4's, but thousands suffering with categories 1 through 3.

Many people will not experience a complete resolution of neck pain and 50% to 80% will experience neck pain again within five years.

A variety of treatment approaches were evaluated for treating grade 1 and 2 neck pain. Some of these included massage, acupuncture, exercise, pain medication and manipulation (chiropractic adjustments). Most of these were effective, but not effective for everyone. There was not much research available on the effectiveness of most of these treatments for Grade 3 neck pain that involved nerve damage. Steroid injections were helpful for some, but did not provide long term relief. Surgery was necessary occasionally, but the researchers recommended that it be used cautiously and only after non-surgical methods are tried.

Chiropractic care was one of the few methods found to be effective for grades 1 through 3. In fact, few methods were found to be as successful as chiropractic care for grade 3 neck pain. The average patient experienced 70% improvement. Chiropractic care was also found to be one of the safest treatments for neck problems.