

Nov 7, 2016

ARTICLE: "I've got a pinched nerve in my neck"

This week we are going to discuss a rather common but multi-faceted condition of a "pinched nerve" in the neck. When patients come to physical therapy for this condition, they often complain of symptoms such as numbness, tingling, weakness, and pain down the arm and are confused by the fact that the pain is in the arm when the problem is in the neck. The answer to this conundrum is that the nerve from the neck extends down the arm and therefore, the sensation from these nerves as well as the motor control from the nerves are experienced in the upper extremities.

One type of "pinched nerve" is spinal stenosis. A narrowing of the central or lateral canal of the spinal column can result in compression or teathering of the nerve as they exit the neck and this can cause symptoms in one or both arms depending on the severity and specific compression. Spinal stenosis is one of the most difficult to treat as well as one of the most problematic.

Another form of pinched nerve in the neck is that of an intervertebral disc bulge or rupture. An intervertebral disc is a pad which separates the vertebra from one another and as such works as a pivot of flexibility as well as a cushion for shock absorption for the spine. In the neck these discs are very small, however, the result of a ruptured or bulging disc in the neck is just as bad as if it were one in the lower back where they are 2-3 times larger. The disc in the neck often initially create a little bit of numbness in the arm and are misunderstood as other conditions while more severe cases turn into weakness in the arms and pain as well as headaches. Disc injuries in the neck can result from trauma such as motor vehicle accidents or as a result of degenerative processing in which the disc gradually narrow to the point that the nerve is compressed. Whichever means the injury takes to attain its painful end, the patient is indeed suffering and requires treatment.

Another form of pinched nerve in the neck is that of zygapophysial joint subluxation. The zygapophysial joint or facet joint are joints which control motion in the neck and can become unstable and lock in a position such that the intervertebral nerve root is compressed. When this occurs the spine also demonstrates limited ROM and accompanying pain.

Treatment for each individual type of pinched nerve is specific as the treatment for spinal stenosis differ from the treatment for an zygapophysial joint subluxation. Treatment for an intervertebral disc bulge differs from treatment for a degenerative disc and so on. As you can see, specificity is extremely important when treating a pinched nerve in the neck. For more information on pinched nerves and how they affect the arm, please feel free to schedule a no cost screening in our office. Thank you