

# Cervical Radiculopathy (Pinched Nerve)

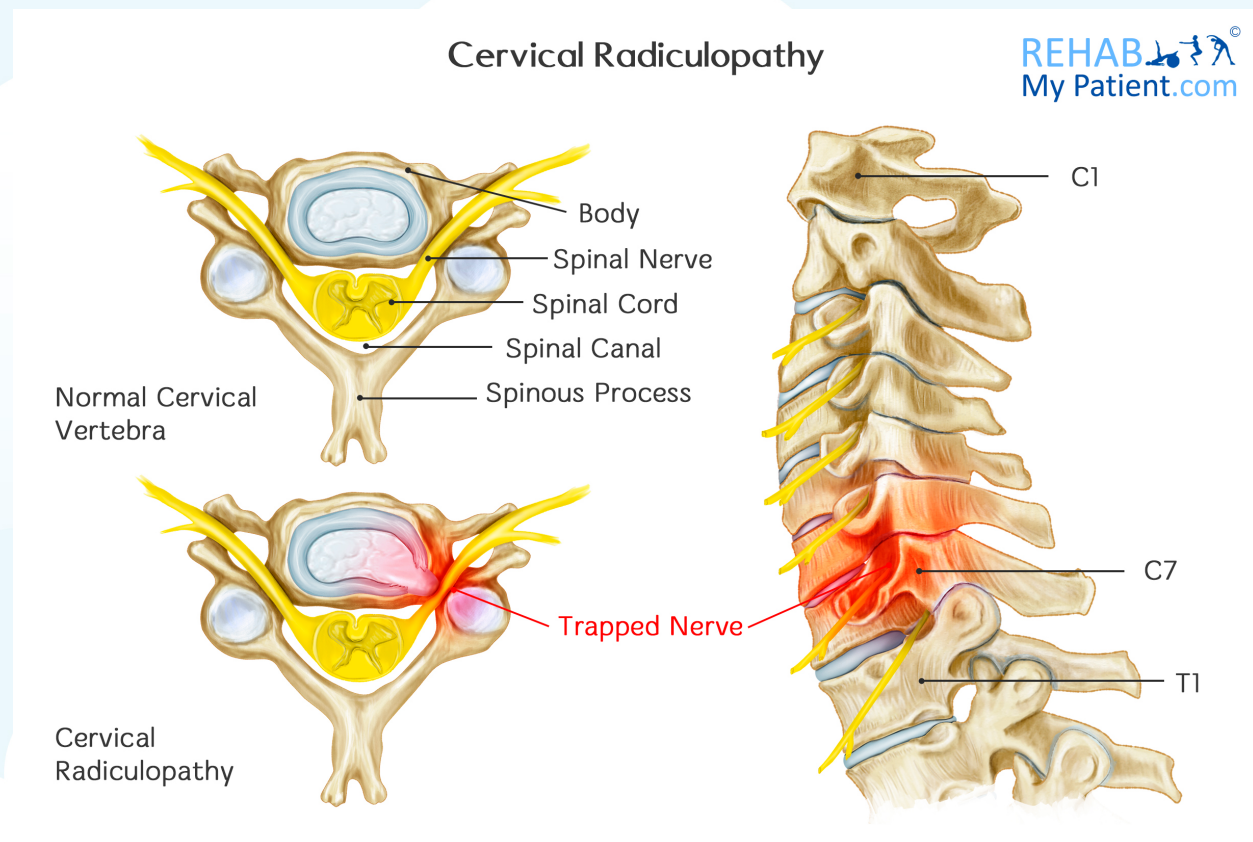
Some individuals suffer with neck pain that could end up radiating down into the arm and the shoulder. Most of the time, this pain is caused due to an injury near the spinal nerve root. This type of injury is often called a pinched nerve (radiculopathy). But it can also be called a trapped nerve.

Individuals with a disc problem in the neck often have disc degeneration or a herniated disc. Individuals with a herniated disc will often have weakness in the disc's outer wall. Those with degeneration have a disc that is broken down. Common risk factors include poor posture, repetitive forward neck bending, auto accidents, elderly patients, and high-impact sports.

## Cervical Radiculopathy Anatomy

Numerous important structures are in the neck. The spinal cord, esophagus, trachea and large blood vessels all run through the neck. Seven stacked bones are within the neck. The column of bones begins underneath the skull and goes all the way to the upper back.

Inside of the spinal column, there is a tube for the spinal cord. This thick bundle of nerves begins at the base of the brain. Its job is to carry information between the brain and the body. The discs are between the vertebrae. They serve as a cushion between the vertebrae in the spine. All of the discs attach to the base of the vertebra above it and the one below it. Muscles and ligaments hold the column together. All of the structures work together to surround, support and protect the spinal cord.



Other things can contribute to a trapped nerve. Most often the trapped nerve is pinched by a disc, but there are other things in the neck that can cause a trapped nerve. The disc is particularly susceptible to poor posture and forward neck bending. So be careful laptop, tablet and smartphone users!



*An MRI scan showing a cervical disc prolapse which caused a pinched nerve*

*An MRI axial image scan showing a trapped nerve from a disc prolapse*

### How to Treat Cervical Radiculopathy:

#### 1. Physical Therapy

Physical therapy can help strengthen and stretch the muscles in the neck. Depending on the situation, traction might also be needed. Soft tissue massage can help reduce muscle spasm in the neck.

#### 2. Pain Relievers

For those who have severe pain that cannot be cured with other alternatives, pain medications can often do the trick. These medications are only prescribed for a limited period of time.

#### 3. Anti-Inflammatory Medication

Ibuprofen and aspirin fall under this category. If your symptoms are the result of nerve swelling, these medications might be beneficial.

#### 4. Oral Corticosteroids

Short-term use of oral corticosteroids can help to minimize pain and swelling.

#### 5. Spinal Injections

Instances occur where steroid injections can be positioned next to where the pinched nerve has occurred. This provides you with similar advantages to that of an oral steroid but it is more localised. Injections can be positioned between the laminae, into the facet joint or in the forearm. Even though the injections might not take the pressure off the nerve, they can help to minimize the swelling and alleviate the pain long enough for the nerve to recover with additional time.

### Tips:

- Poor posture and sitting for long periods at a desk are the biggest cause of a trapped nerve.
- Sleeping badly can also trap a nerve, so make sure you have comfortable pillows and seek advice from your therapist about how many pillows to sleep with.
- Those who participate in high-impact sports are at a far greater risk of getting a pinched nerve than other individuals.
- An auto accident is one of the common contributors to cervical radiculopathy.
- As you age, the chance of getting a pinched nerve continues to increase significantly.
- Growing older means the bones deteriorate. Those who have osteoporosis are likely to end up with cervical radiculopathy.
- Females who are going through menopause might find that their bones deteriorate and a pinched nerve can occur.