

Levator Scapulae Syndrome

The levator scapulae muscle runs from the shoulder blade to the neck, and there is one muscle each side. Their function is to assist in various movements of the neck, shoulder and arm, such as shrugging. The literal term means to elevate the scapula (shoulder blade).

Muscle tightness and knots in the levator scapulae muscle can give pain in the shoulder and neck. They are often caused by repeatedly hunching the shoulder. Such occasions usually involve stressful situations, poor posture at work, or driving for long periods.

Sharp pain around and in the neck will often radiate upwards causing headaches. It isn't unusual to experience an extended period of discomfort in the area, as the pain can become chronic. Movement might become restricted in the neck, with stiffness and pain becoming worse when attempting normal movements throughout the day. Neck rotation is usually restricted, so you might notice you are having difficulty looking all the way over your shoulder.

In those who are involved in a number of physical activities and sporting events, the most common cause of the syndrome is overuse, which can arise from a number of different factors including weight training (especially doing shrugs or reverse rows), or sports that involve throwing.

Levator Scapulae Syndrome Anatomy

The levator scapulae muscle is located along the back and side of the neck. It's just one component of the muscle system in the shoulder. The main function of the muscle is to lift the scapula. If an individual experiences stiffness in the neck and shoulder, the levator scapulae muscle is often involved. Whenever the shoulder is shrugged, the muscle is being used. When a heavy bag is carried, the muscle helps your body to bear its burden. It begins at the vertebrae located just below the skull.

The levator scapulae muscle can refer pain to the top of the head, the middle of the neck, and also to the shoulder blade.

How to Treat Levator Scapulae Syndrome:

1. Reduce Painful Activities

Stop participating in any activities that make the condition worse. The best thing you can do is take time away from participating in strenuous activities and allow the muscle the time it needs to heal. Avoid doing a lot of shoulder and arm movements to prevent placing additional strain on the muscle.

2. Reduce Stress

This is a classic stress problem, so look at ways of reducing your stress levels. If problems cannot be resolved then look at ways of coping with stress such as meditation, exercise, or relaxation.

3. Ice and/or Heat

Apply ice and/or heat to the injured site for 5-10 minutes at a time three times per day. The ice will help to reduce swelling in the shoulder, neck and arm area. The heat will help improve blood flow. Make sure to wrap them in a thin cloth to prevent a burn from occurring.

Tips:

- Failing to warm-up properly before participating in activities can cause this syndrome to occur. Make sure to strengthen and stretch the muscles properly to minimize the risk of injury.
- Avoid training for extensive periods of time when the muscles have already become noticeably weaker.
- Don't increase your exercise program too quickly. Your muscles won't have the time needed to adjust.
- Make sure to maintain proper posture throughout the course of the day, especially for those who are sitting for extended time periods.
- Previous injuries to the neck or shoulders, or any pre-existing deficiency in these areas, can also place you at an increased risk of developing the syndrome.
- REDUCE STRESS!



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