

Your neck is worth remembering

By John Hartenberger, PT, CMTPT



In the October edition of Nature's Pathways, one of my partners, Nick Talaryczk, made reference to the importance of core strengthening. He went on to describe the anatomy and musculature of the trunk core and did a great job explaining the importance of keeping the core strong, fit, under control and toned. But what about the neck? Is core strengthening

for the neck as important as the trunk? And if so, what should you focus on?

Let's see if these questions can be answered. First of all, is neck core strengthening important? Absolutely! Consider a few points. The neck curvature is very similar to the low back curvature, namely, a lordosis, an inward curving from front to back. Therefore, strengthening and

dynamically stabilizing that curve is going to be fairly beneficial. Granted, the cervical spine is a dynamic and unique structure made up of two mechanically diverse areas: the upper cervical spine between the skull and second cervical vertebrae and the lower cervical spine comprised of the second cervical through the seventh cervical vertebra. So whatever the region that needs primary attention, that region is still in need of core strengthening. So yes, the neck, like the trunk, is in need of core strengthening.

But what may that core strengthening emphasis be? There's the golden question!

Let's figure it out. Posturally, a common problem exists, a problem we call forward head. Forward head is simply what it says! The head is too far forward to the upper part of the body, in fact the rest of the entire body, causing all kinds of muscular overuses and abnormal mechanical stresses and strains. More specifically with a forward head, the posterior neck muscles tend to get tight, strong and shortened, while the deep, small, anterior muscles especially become elongated and weak. So as you can see, a muscle imbalance becomes inevitable, creating a poor core strength reality.

So, what's the remedy?

Many modes of treatment can be very beneficial, including joint mobilization,

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Deep neck flexor strengthening exercise



1. Starting position



2. Chin tuck



3. Maintaining chin tuck, lift head 1 inch from surface and hold

soft-tissue mobilization, strengthening and posture correction. Ergonomic assessment and correction also is imperative, as well as self-directed neck exercise including neck core strengthening. But once again, what might be a critical neck core strengthening exercise? What may be the most beneficial in developing neck core strength?


Well, as a physical therapist of 35 years, and given the muscle imbalance situation that arises with forward head, I would propose possibly the most critical core strengthening focus needs to be that of the deep neck flexors. They chronically become weakened and elongated. These are

primarily smaller muscles that attach into the front of the neck structures and bones. These are often forgotten muscles regarding strengthening, but need to be strengthened.

So, how do you strengthen them? Here's how: lie on your back, keep your head on the bed/table, tuck your chin, keep your chin tucked, and slowly lift or roll the back of your head off the bed/table 1 inch and hold it. Keep your chin tucked!

You may notice that this is not easy! That's because of deep neck flexor weakness — at least in part. Improving strength in these muscles is critical to increase strength in your neck core.

Now there may be contraindications to this exercise, such as an active disc herniation in the neck among others, so it may be beneficial to get your neck checked out and possibly treated before you begin this exercise.

So when it comes to core strengthening, don't forget your neck, especially the small but important deep neck flexors. 



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