

PHYSICAL THERAPY PROTOCOL

Cervical Sprain / Strain — Nonoperative Management

Conservative rehabilitation of a neck sprain/strain ("whiplash"-type)

Most cervical sprains resolve with active rehabilitation. Early care focuses on pain control and gentle motion (avoiding prolonged immobilization), progressing to postural correction and deep neck-flexor and scapular strengthening.

General Precautions

- Avoid prolonged collar use and prolonged static postures.
- Progress within comfort; sharp or radiating symptoms should be reported.
- Report any arm numbness, weakness, or worsening symptoms.

Phase I — Pain Control & Motion Weeks 0-2

Goals

- Reduce pain and muscle guarding
- Restore gentle motion
- Restore posture

Precautions / Restrictions

- Avoid heavy lifting and prolonged static neck positions

Exercises & Interventions

- Gentle active cervical range of motion
- Scapular setting and postural correction
- Modalities / heat as needed
- Deep neck-flexor activation (chin nods)

Criteria to Advance

- Pain reduced
- Improving motion

Phase II — Mobility & Strengthening Weeks 2-6

Goals

- Restore full motion
- Build neck and scapular strength

Exercises & Interventions

- Progress cervical range of motion to full
- Isometric then progressive deep neck-flexor strengthening
- Scapular and upper-back strengthening
- Postural endurance
- Thoracic mobility

Criteria to Advance

- Full pain-free motion
- Improving strength/endurance

Phase III — Return to Activity Weeks 6-12

Goals

- Restore full function
- Prevent recurrence

Exercises & Interventions

- Progressive strengthening and endurance
- Ergonomic and workstation education
- Return to full work/sport activity

Criteria to Advance

- Full painless function
- Good postural endurance

This protocol is a general guideline. Progression is criteria-based and may be advanced or slowed by Dr. O'Donnell based on intraoperative findings, tissue quality, fixation, and individual healing. Time frames are approximate. Direct questions to the office at (305) 393-8810.