Exercises for Thoracic Outlet Syndrome

Information for patients who have been diagnosed with Thoracic Outlet Syndrome

Read this pamphlet to learn more about:

- Thoracic Outlet Syndrome
- Treatment options
- Exercises you can do
- Where to learn more
What is Thoracic Outlet Syndrome?
Thoracic Outlet Syndrome (called TOS in this pamphlet) is a common but challenging condition that affects the front of the shoulder and neck area, just below the “V” where they meet.

The picture below shows this area.
There are 3 different types of TOS that cause similar problems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of TOS</th>
<th>Causes</th>
<th>What to do</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neurological TOS</td>
<td>Squeezing together of nerves that affects the neck and down the arm.</td>
<td>• Exercise. See pages 6 and 7.</td>
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<td>• Correct your posture. See page 5.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Postural or functional TOS</td>
<td>Bad posture. Slouched posture causes changes in the muscles that affect the nerves and blood vessels.</td>
<td>• Exercise. See pages 6 and 7.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Correct your posture. See page 5.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vascular TOS</td>
<td>Squeezing together of the artery or vein under the collar bone.</td>
<td>• Exercise. See pages 6 and 7.</td>
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<td>*This is the rarest form of TOS, but also the most serious.</td>
<td>• Can make the arm or hand feel cold, pale and weak.</td>
<td>• Correct your posture. See page 5.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Can be painful and look spotted or blotchy.</td>
<td>• You may need surgery if vascular TOS is not treated.</td>
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</tbody>
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**What is the treatment?**

The exercises on pages 5 and 6 help to treat TOS and focus on:

- decreasing symptoms
- improving posture
- returning to more normal function
How do I prepare for my treatment?

Before you begin your exercises:

1. Warm your muscles before stretching.
   Heat the neck and shoulder area with a warm shower or heating pad set to LOW for about 10 to 15 minutes or until you feel warm. You should NEVER feel hot, as this may lead to a burn.

2. Stretch gently.
   You should feel a pull in your muscles, but not pain.
   If stretching becomes painful, try to not go so far into the stretch.

3. Hold your stretches.
   Avoid “bouncing” when you stretch.

4. Pay attention to how you feel.
   If your hand starts to feel cold, numb or begins to tingle, stop stretching.
How to correct your posture

Try to sit tall when you are sitting or standing. Slouching causes the shoulders and neck to roll forward, and can tighten the muscles in your neck and shoulders.
Ask your doctor first before you start any new exercise program.

1. Neck Stretch

Look straight ahead.

Bend your right ear to your right shoulder, without looking down or looking up.

If your physiotherapist says it is ok, turn your chin down or up.

Hold for 20 to 30 seconds. Repeat _____ times, ______ times a day.

2. Shoulder stretch (3 positions)

Start with your elbows or arms low or with your arms straight by your side.

Lean your body weight forward until you feel a stretch in the front part of the shoulder or chest.

Hold for 20 to 30 seconds. Repeat _____ times, ______ times a day.
3. Shoulder blade squeeze

Squeeze your shoulder blades together.

Repeat ______ times, ______ times a day.

As this exercise becomes easier, you can increase the number of squeezes.

For example: Do 1 set of 10, 2 sets of 10, and 3 sets of 10.

Your physiotherapist can help.

These exercises are only a start.
Find a physiotherapist that you can work with to help you.
Where to learn more

Here are some reliable websites that have information about TOS:

**National Institute for Neurological Disorders and Stroke:**
Website: www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/thoracic/thoracic.htm

**Cleveland Clinic:**
Website: http://my.clevelandclinic.org/disorders/thoracic_outlet_syndrome/hic_thoracic_outlet_syndrome.aspx

**Mayo Clinic:**
Website: www.mayoclinic.com/health/thoracic-outlet-syndrome/DS00800

**TGH Peter and Melaine Munk Patient & Family Learning Centre and Library** for more reliable health information
In person: 1st Floor, Norman Urquhart Building
Website: www.uhnpatienteducation.ca

Where to find us

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