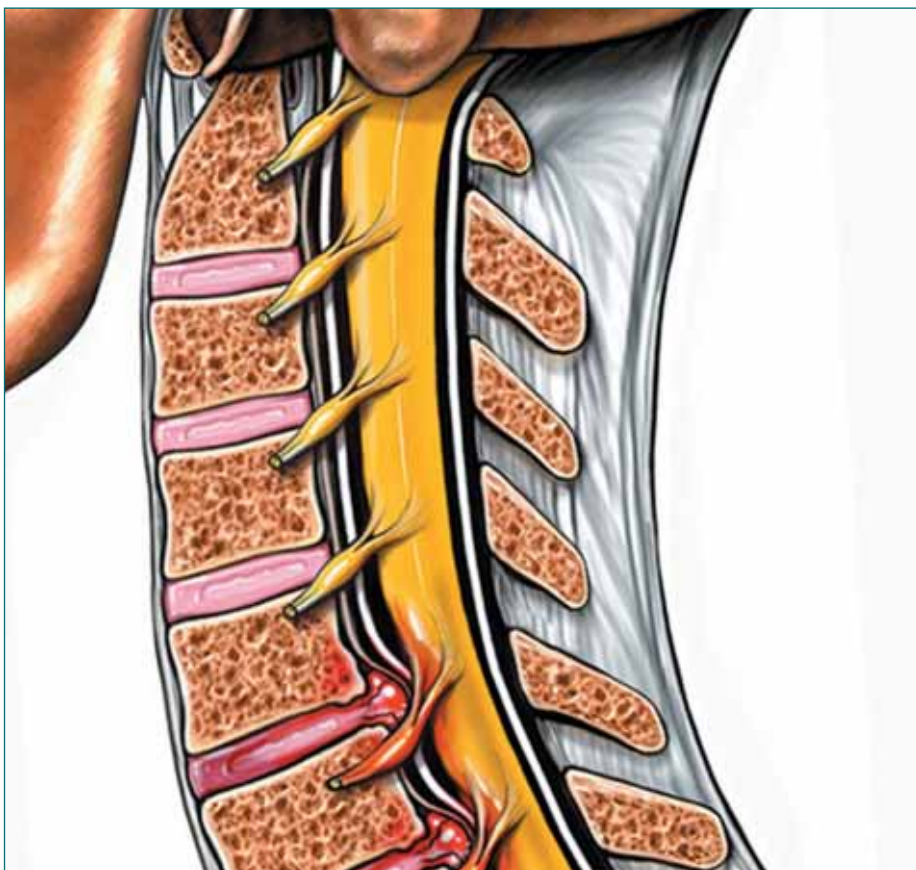


Cervical spondylosis (CS)

Cervical spondylosis (CS) may be caused by one or more of several complaints. A very common mistake made about cervical spondylosis is to perceive the cause of illness as a singular factor. Treating the patient for a single factor like a spur or a slipped disc in the neck need not always completely alleviate the patient's suffering.



CS is more frequently seen in women than men. A thorough knowledge of the structure and functioning of the neck has become essential to understand and successfully treat CS.

CS can come from a number of disorders and diseases of any structures in the neck. It can be caused by an injury, muscular problem or by a trapped nerve between vertebrae. Inappropriate working or sleeping posture may also cause CS.

Mobility of the spine is dependent on several small joints and the derangement of the functioning of one of these can cause neck pain and reduced movements. It has also been possible to study the effects on the spine of external influences like concussion, hypertension, hyperflexion, etc. Routine activities like travelling, household work and office jobs, though in themselves quite innocuous are potential triggers which can lead to serious damage of the neck which results in prolonged CS. Knowledge of such aggravating factors would prove beneficial and ensure a successful therapy outcome.

With the increase in the number of workers who sit for hours at a time doing desk work or sitting for hours in front of the computer or who work in call centres, all of which require continuous sitting in one posture, the number of people suffering with CS is on the rise. CS is 'wear and tear' of the vertebrae and discs in the neck.

What is cervical spondylosis?

To an extent, we all develop a degree of degeneration in the vertebrae and discs as we become older. However, cervical spondylosis is a term used if the degree of degeneration is accelerated and when this causes more symptoms than is expected for a given age.

As the discs degenerate over many years they

become thinner. Sometimes the adjacent vertebrae develop small, rough areas of bone on their edges. Then nearby muscles, ligaments, and nerves may become irritated by these degenerative changes which can cause troublesome symptoms.

What is a herniated inter-vertebral disc?

The inter-vertebral discs are made up of two concentric layers, the inner gel called annulus pulposus and the outer fibrous annulus fibrosus. As a result of advancing age, the nucleus loses fluid, volume and resiliency and the entire disc structure becomes more susceptible to trauma and compression. The disc becomes vulnerable to tears and, as this occurs, the inner annulus pulposus protrudes through the fibrous layer, producing a bulge in the inter-vertebral disc. This condition is called a herniated disk. This compresses the spinal cord or the emerging nerve roots and leads to associated problems.

What are the symptoms of cervical spondylosis?

In brief, symptoms can vary from mild to severe. You may have a flare up of symptoms if you overuse your neck, or if you sprain a neck muscle or ligament. Symptoms include:

- ☞ Pain in the neck. This may spread to the base of the skull and shoulders. Movement of the neck may make the pain worse. The pain sometimes spreads down an arm to a hand or fingers. The pain tends to wax and wane with flare-ups from time to time. However, some people develop chronic (persistent) pain.
- ☞ Some neck stiffness, particularly after a night's rest.
- ☞ Headaches from time to time. The headaches often start at the back of the head just above the neck and travel over the top to the forehead.
- ☞ Numbness, pins and needles or weakness may occur in part of the arm or hand. Tell a doctor if these symptoms occur as they may indicate a problem with a 'trapped nerve'.

The Western diagnosis is usually through physical examination and imaging.

☞ Physical examination - the doctor may identify tender spots along the neck and evaluate your ability to move the neck in various directions. The function of the nerves and muscles in the arms and legs may be tested. Imaging - X-rays and MRI studies may be used to show bone spur and other abnormalities and reveal the extent of damage to the cervical spine.

The causes

1. Ligaments - The vertebrae are held together by ligaments to form the spine. Ligaments also form capsules around the joints. The ligaments help to maintain the harmonious movement of the spine. During an accident, if the ligaments are torn the movement will become abnormal and will cause pain in the neck. Unfortunately, ligaments cannot be seen on an X-ray. One has to keep an open mind if one is to appreciate problems of this kind. Ligaments make an important contribution to the dynamics of the spine and thus in the

causation of pain in the neck. Once a ligament is torn there is abnormal movement which in turn precipitates degeneration in the disc resulting in more pain in the neck.

The abnormal movement in the cervical spine is accentuated but, once correctly identified, it can be treated in good time to give the patient relief from pain. With abnormal movement, the blood vessels supplying blood to the spinal cord can become 'kinked'. For want of blood supply the cells of the spinal cord die and their function cannot be retrieved by even an ostensibly successful operation. This is why once paralysis sets in, one of the contributing factors is lack of blood supply and recovery becomes unpredictable. The neurological deficit or paralysis in cervical spondylosis is the result of more than one factor and the outcome cannot always be a positive one.

2. Spur or osteophyte - When the disc degenerates, the edges of vertebral bodies start rubbing against each other. This movement is rough and gritty as against the normal movement. This movement is abnormal and if the bodies develop bony spikes they are a source of pain in the neck and they can be seen on an X-ray. If one of these pointed spurs sticks into the nerve root, it causes severe pain in the arm. Others can cause compression of the cord and produce paralysis in the legs.

3. Abnormal movement - If an X-ray of the spine is done at the age of 40 years, 30% of show degenerative changes and, at the age of 50, almost 50% show evidence of CS. However, not all complained of pain in the neck and one has to be judicious in correlating the X-ray findings with the symptoms of the patient. Movements of a degenerated spine are not smooth. There is no flexibility or elasticity in the ligaments and the inter-vertebral disc is lost. Even a relatively minor blow can produce severe pain in the neck.

Orthodox treatment for cervical spondylosis

Exercise your neck and keep active. Aim to keep your neck moving as normally as possible. As far as possible, continue with normal activities. In the past, some people have worn a neck collar for long periods when a flare-up of neck pain developed. It is now known that if you wear a collar for long periods it may cause the neck to 'stiffen up'. So, attempt to keep it as active as possible.

☞ Workers who spend hours doing desk work or in front of computers should take small breaks in between and try and do simple neck exercises.

Some of those neck pains and stiffness, which do not improve in spite of exercise and medication, are most certainly due to stress. When a person is under constant stress the muscles in the neck go into spasm and cause pain and stiffness in the neck, so it is very important for the doctor to identify the cause and treat it accordingly.

- ☞ Medication or other non-narcotic pain relievers can relieve pain and reduce swelling.
- ☞ Physical therapy - Heat and cervical traction or an active exercise programme can relieve pain symptoms.

Oriental Body Balance treatment with Traditional Chinese Medicine

Signs and symptoms give the OBB therapist a distinct syndrome of imbalance between either an internal organ issue, blood and body fluid issue, or a combination of both imposing on the structure. This is called a differential diagnosis.

From this a plan of treatment evolves, which normally involves muscle testing to diagnose spinal mechanics and local muscle weakness and imbalance, energy medicine, cranial balancing and acupuncture/ herbal medicine. This treatment protocol addresses the causes listed above. The timescale is dependent on the degree of attrition, and may take some time to resolve. Our successes with this condition reflect the confidence in our system. We do not state here that we cure, but many of the symptoms are addressed. And people acknowledge this and go on to lead an active life without the aggravation of limited movement and pain. **TT**

© Clinton Sandall CCA TCM ATCM Integrated Tuina Specialist Senior Instructor at the College of Oriental Body Balance Dr John Brazier (TCM) teaches his award winning diploma in Oriental Body Balance in London and the North. It includes Eastern and Western assessment, diagnosis and treatment skills covering both the mind and the body. His worldwide success and the success of his students speaks for itself. To find out more about his training courses please call 01253 728035 www.orientalbodybalance.co.uk

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