

Nerve Root Irritation

The problem

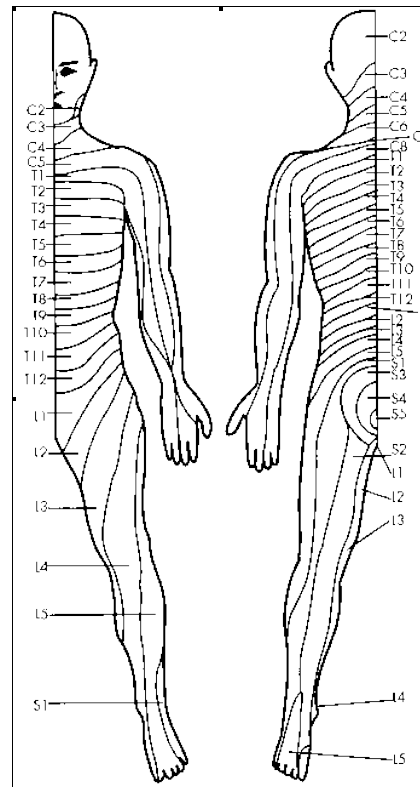
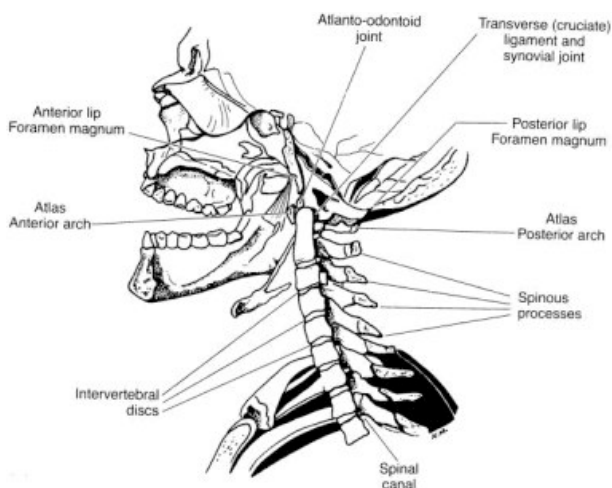
- Neck and/or arm pain
- Numbness/pins and needles in arms/hands
- Weakness in arms
- These problems are caused by the nerve being compressed as it leaves the spine

Interesting facts

- Cervical nerve root irritation can also be called cervical radiculopathy
- The cause of the problem is more likely to be from the disc in the early to middle aged patient and arthritis in older patients
- The irritation of the nerve can be from swelling in the immediate area (chemical radiculitis)
- A small-sample study examining the cervical spine in symptom-free volunteers found focal disc protrusions in 50% of participants on MRI. This shows that a considerable proportion of the population can have focal herniated discs in their cervical spine (neck) but this finding does not necessarily mean that they will have noticeable symptoms.

What you can expect/look out for

- Loss of strength or muscle reflexes can indicate severe nerve irritation and may require urgent attention.
- Pain either in the neck or referred down the arm



Management options

- You will need a thorough physical assessment to determine the extent of the damage.
- Any therapy intervention needs to have a positive outcome ASAP and should never irritate symptoms
- Treatment can vary depending on the degree of pathology from a 'wait and monitor' intervention to medication, injection or traction therapy with the most severe cases occasionally needing spinal decompressive surgery

More information

- <http://www.eorthopod.com/content/cervical-radiculopathy>
- <http://emedicine.medscape.com/article/305720-overview>

References

- Ernst, C Prevalence of annular tears and disc herniations on MR images of the cervical spine in symptom free volunteers *European Journal of Radiology*, Volume 55, Issue 3, Pages 409-414

This handout was prepared by **Sydney Sports and Orthopaedic Physiotherapy** and is intended as a general information service. Please note that the information provided is not intended as a substitute for advice from a registered physician or healthcare professional. If symptoms persist, please consult your doctor.

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