

## Contact details

Physiotherapy Department

Torbay Hospital

Newton Road

Torquay

Devon

TQ2 7AA

☎ 0300 456 8000 or 01803 614567

📘 TorbayAndSouthDevonFT

🐦 @TorbaySDevonNHS

[www.torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.uk/](http://www.torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.uk/)

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## PATIENT INFORMATION

# Cervical Spine

## Nerve Pain



*Working with you, for you*

## A Brief Neck Anatomy

The normal neck (cervical spine) has 7 bones (vertebrae) and a collection of nerves which branch out in pairs at each level. In between each vertebra there is a disc which acts as a shock absorber and spacer.

The spinal nerves are like electrical wiring, providing signals to areas within the neck, shoulders and arms. These control sensation and movement but can cause pain when they are affected.



## Treatment

**When the clinical diagnosis and MRI findings correlate, confirmation of diagnosis and ongoing management is possible.**

Unfortunately, there are risks of severe consequences with Cervical Spine nerve root injections. These types of treatment are not routinely offered for neck related arm pain as the risk of injury outweighs any potential benefit.

If your pain has been longstanding and severe, then there are a few options available:

1. Referral to the Pain Services
2. Orthopaedic surgical consideration (if appropriate)
3. Treatment under care of your GP and/or physiotherapist

Often your pain will improve given enough time to heal, however some people will require a bit of help.

## Pain Services

The Pain Management Service are a multi-disciplinary team who help in the management of painful conditions. They include, but are not limited to; Consultant Anaesthetists, Psychologists, Physiotherapists, Nurse Specialists and Exercise Coordinators.

You can access information about the Pain Services at:

<https://www.torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.uk/services/pain-service/reconnect2life/>

*ReConnect2Life*

## Will I get better?

The likelihood is that most nerve root pain will improve naturally over time. Very few people require surgery for their symptoms. NICE guidelines recommend physiotherapy and exercise as a way of managing your symptoms. This can also be helped with the use of simple over the counter pain relief to allow you to move more freely.

If your pain is more severe, you can discuss with your GP about specific nerve pain relief.

Generally normal activity and maintaining movement is the best way to optimize your chance of recovering.

## Investigation

MRI is a type of scan which uses magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to create detailed pictures of your spine.

**MRI scans are mainly used to confirm a clinical diagnosis** such as pain arising from a nerve root. Once a level is identified which corresponds to your symptoms, this can help to confirm diagnosis.

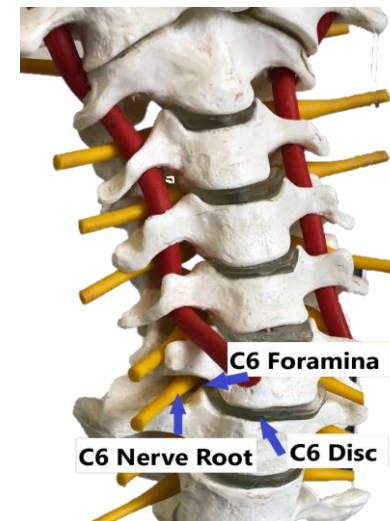
For more information, please see the Radiology Website: <http://videos.torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.uk/radiology>



## What is Cervical Radiculopathy?

Nerve root pain (also called radicular pain or radiculopathy) is the name for pain coming from a nerve in the spine.

Cervical radiculopathy can be caused by a disc bulge, but there are other causes, such as narrowing of the nerve exits in the spine (called foraminae).



## What are the main symptoms of cervical nerve pain?

Irritation of the nerves in the cervical spine can cause a variety of **arm symptoms**, which differ from person to person. Common symptoms include:

- Pain
- Pins and needles
- Numbness
- Muscle Weakness

Nerve pain can spread below the shoulder in the affected limb. Neck and shoulder blade (scapula) pain is often present.

## How is Cervical Nerve Pain Diagnosed?

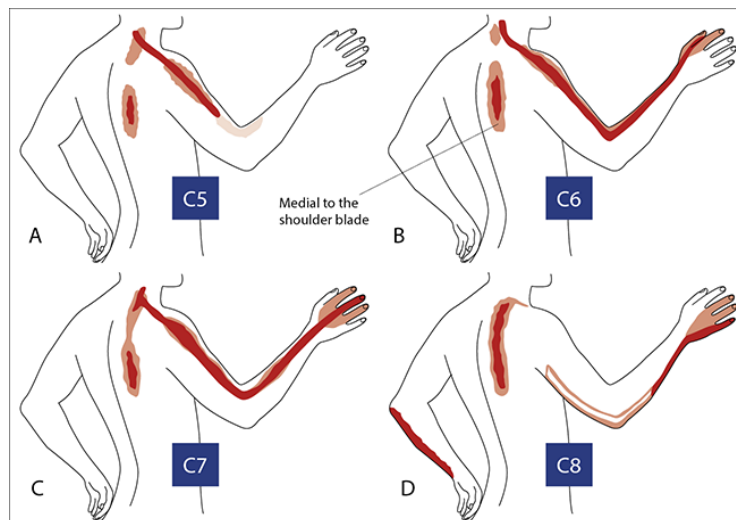
A cervical radiculopathy is diagnosed from the signs and symptoms you describe alongside an examination, which may include:

- History taking
- Observation
- Movements of the neck
- Nerve tests including, sensation, reflexes and muscle power
- Balance, dexterity and co-ordination testing

## How can this affect me?

Nerve symptoms can be felt in the neck, scapula, shoulder, upper arm, forearm and hand, depending on the nerve that is affected.

The pictures below demonstrate common patterns of symptoms into the region relative to which nerve level is affected.



## Surgery

Surgery is not reliably used for improving symptoms of neck pain, numbness, pins and needles or weakness. It may only be reliable for improving symptoms of pain in the upper limb.

In rare cases, surgery may be a consideration for your upper limb pain. *The British Association of Spinal Surgeons (BASS)* has lots of patient information for certain types of surgery.

The most commonly used surgery for the cervical spine is cervical decompression, including a procedure called Anterior Cervical Decompression and Fusion (ACDF).

Please see [www.spinesurgeons.ac.uk](http://www.spinesurgeons.ac.uk) for more details.

## Useful Websites & References

[www.spinesurgeons.ac.uk](http://www.spinesurgeons.ac.uk) British Association of Spinal Surgeons including useful patient information for common spinal treatments

<http://videos.torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.uk/radiology>  
Radiology TSDFT website

<https://www.torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.uk/services/pain-service/reconnect2life/> Reconnect2life website with lots of useful patient information and resources