NECK STRENGTHENING EXERCISES

Neck strengthening is one of the most important things you can do to help prevent concussion and neck injuries. If you have access to neck-strengthening equipment, that's great, but you don't need it. The following descriptions show you how to do these easy exercises anytime, anywhere.

STANDING EXERCISES

For each of these exercises, you will hold for 10 seconds and repeat 3 times on each side.
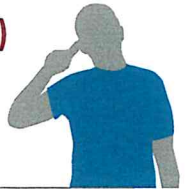
1 LATERAL SIDE BEND (NEUTRAL)

Look straight ahead, use light pressure from your fingertips at the side of your head. Resist bending head sideways.
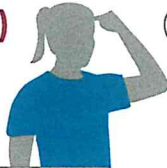
2 LATERAL SIDE BEND (FLEXED)

Look straight ahead, tilt the head toward the shoulder. Use light pressure from your fingertips at the side of your head. Resist tilting head farther to the side.

3 FORWARD FLEXION (NEUTRAL)

Look straight ahead, use light pressure from your fingertips at your forehead, resist bending the head forward.

4 FORWARD FLEXION (FLEXED)

Bend head forward, use light pressure from your fingertips at forehead. Resist bending head farther forward.

5 EXTENSION (NEUTRAL)

Look straight ahead, use light pressure from your fingertips at back of your head. Resist bending head backward.

6 EXTENSION (FLEXED)

Bend head slightly backward, use light pressure from your fingertips at back of your head. Resist bending head farther backward.

7 ROTATION (NEUTRAL)

Look straight ahead, use light pressure to the side of your head and resist turning head to the side.

8 ROTATION (RESISTED)

Look straight ahead and turn head slightly to the side. Use light pressure to the side of your head and resist turning head farther.

FLOOR EXERCISES

For each of these exercises, you will do this 10 times, working yourself up to another set of 10.

9 NECK LIFT

1) Start with your back flat, knees bent and feet on the floor. Bend your shoulders and elbows to 90 degrees. Keep your shoulders, arms and elbows and back of your hands on the floor.

2) Keep your head and neck straight, lift your head and neck straight up, like you are trying to touch the ceiling with your nose.

This is slow and controlled. The count should be: up 1, 2, 3; down 1, 2, 3 and repeat. You should feel the muscles in the front of your neck starting to burn.

FLOOR EXERCISES

For each of these exercises, you will do this 10 times, working yourself up to another set of 10.

(10) NECK LIFT WITH HEADCURL

1) Start with your back flat, knees bent and feet on the floor. Bend your shoulders and elbows to 90 degrees.

2) Lift your head up.

3) Roll your chin into your chest, hold for 1 second and roll head back to the floor.

The key to this exercise is slow and controlled. If your hands, shoulders or arms lift up while you are doing this exercise, you're not using your neck (shoulders or abs are engaged instead). Lift up and roll for 2 seconds, hold, and back down slowly — 1, 2, 3.
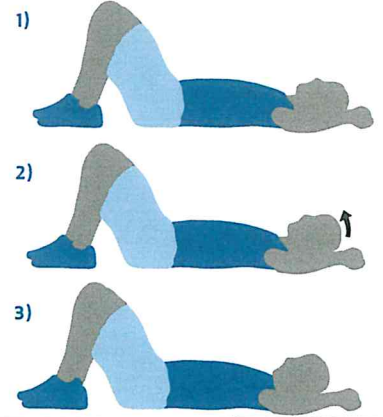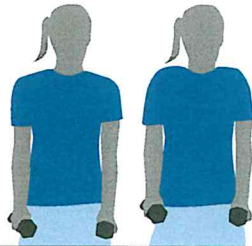
EXERCISES WITH GYM EQUIPMENT

The following exercises can be done with machines, free weights, exercise band or tubing. For each of these exercises use enough weight or resistance to do only 8 to 10 repetitions, 3 times (sets). Make sure your motion is slow and controlled.
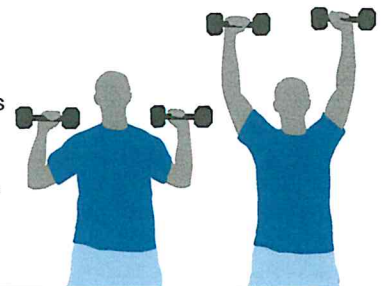
(11) SHOULDER SHRUG

Slowly shrug your shoulders up, back and down.

(12) SHOULDER PRESS

Raise your arms so that elbows are even with shoulders and flexed at about 90 degrees. Then, raise the weight, band or tubing toward the ceiling while straightening the elbows.

(13) STANDING OR SEATED ROW WITH EXTERNAL SHOULDER ROTATION

In a standing or seated position, using free weights or tubing, lift your arms to the front, stopping at 90 degrees. Now, pull backward, bending the elbows to 90 degrees. Pinch the shoulder blades together, then rotate forearms up. Hold for 1 second, then return to starting position.

(14) UPRIGHT ROW

Standing with legs shoulder-width apart and knees slightly bent with palms of your hands in front of your thighs, hold the weight or use a band. Pull your arms up and stop at chest height. Shoulders should be at 90 degrees and elbows bent to the sides. Return to your starting position and continue.