

Torticollis: A Review

By Steven T. Tanaka, D.C.

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Acquired torticollis is caused by contraction of the cervical musculature that results in a stiff or wry neck, and often, excruciating pain. Its Latin root words are tortus (twisted) and collum (neck). (Calliet)

There are several types of torticollis. Basically, the primary categories are clonic/spasmodic or tonic. A further break-down of types includes congenital postural, congenital muscular, benign paroxysmal, spasmodic, acute, hysterical, and some uncommon forms due to underlying factors, such as, tumors, infections, trauma, and developmental malformations. (Bolton)

If it was precipitated by trauma, a x-ray examination is wise to conduct in order to rule out vertebral dislocations and/or fractures. If there is nuchal rigidity or a spastic sternocleidomastoid muscle, particularly if there is fever or infection, one must rule out an underlying infectious condition. When an infant is found with torticollis, it may be a congenital form. Some rare neurologic conditions may lead to torticollis. Hysteria or other psychological manifestations are known causes of torticollis.

The typical torticollis presentation to the chiropractic office is associated with vertebral subluxation. Typically, the patient presents a stiff and painful cervical spine that is maintained in lateral flexion. Many times, the patient is a child. The subluxation may be anywhere from the pelvis to the occiput. The subluxation is commonly found in the lower cervical or upper thoracic spine, although there might be a concomitant subluxation in the mid-thoracic spine or lower.

References & Resources

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