

Relief for Your Aching Neck! The Value Of A Neck Roll

By Allison Ishman, Clinical Massage Therapist, Certified Personal Trainer

You know those pretty round rolls that come with your bedding, and they're upholstered to match? Those are neck rolls. While you may not have considered using one for anything other than decoration, they can be extremely helpful in reducing neck, shoulder, and arm pain or discomfort.

Knowing a little about the muscles in your neck will help you understand. We have 8 scalene muscles in the front of our necks, along with two SCM muscles. SCM stands for sternocleidomastoid, for you detail-oriented types out there. The scalenes in particular tend to become tight in people that use a computer often (especially if your ergonomics are not set up correctly). Scalenes are often tight in people that are on the phone frequently in a fixated position, do a lot of driving and look relatively straight as a result, or do public speaking or teaching. These muscles are technically used to lift your first rib and your collarbone when you actively breathe in. But, I find them tight in people doing the static types of activities. They lead to headaches in some people, and simple tension in others.

All day long, those scalenes are working to help hold your head in position. Your head weighs close to 18 pounds, so that is no small task. These muscles work with the trapezius muscles (the "traps" and some additional smaller muscles in back to surround your cervical spine. These are the muscles that support the vertebrae in your neck and help to maintain its position. After repeated use in stabilized positions, scalene muscles tend to tighten up in that stabilized position and stiffen. Over time, constant tension tires out these muscles. A round neck roll can help to support your normal spinal curve, allowing the scalenes a much-needed rest. Stretching is also helpful, but there is nothing like a good supportive rest to give to these hard-working neck muscles, and so I am always recommending a neck roll. My clients tend to rave about them, and have to guard against their spouse "stealing" theirs. More often than not, they wind up getting a second neck roll for the bed so each person has one!

The scalene muscles tend to become very tight in people that

- 1. Use a computer often**
- 2. Are on the phone frequently**
- 3. Do a lot of driving**
- 4. Do public speaking or teaching**

Scalenes tire out, and a neck roll can help to support your normal spinal curve, allowing the scalenes a much-needed rest.

I consider a neck roll a "bed accessory". Using a neck roll doesn't have to take place when you're sleeping. You can use one to support your neck while sitting up reading or watching TV in bed. You can use it on the couch. Of course, you can also use it when you're sleeping on your back. When on your side, you will just want a regular pillow that supports your head and neck.

In my practice, I carry [a neck roll with a poly-fill core that deflates to your neck size](#), and re-inflates when you get up from it. It also has a hot or cold pack that velcros on. It comes with a cotton cover that goes in the wash. I like it. But, anything that is a round roll will give you this support works for me. I advise against a rolled up towel, as it just tends to be too hard for a neck to relax into.

I prefer a neck roll to a "cutout" pillow with a dip in the middle. I find that the cutout pillow still forces you to translate forward – jutting out your chin, and still not really being in alignment.

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