

Cervical spondylosis: neck pain, stiffness and the pillow

Cervical spondylosis, often loosely called "spondylitis", is age-related wear in the neck's discs and joints, present in more than 85% of people over 60. It brings neck pain, stiffness and headaches that come and go, and every night the pillow sets the neck's angle for hours. The mechanism, the Neck Disability Index, the spondylitis mix-up, the treatment routes and what a pillow can and can't do.

Saiyed Abdal · 16 Oct 2026 · Frido Care Academy

CLINICAL SUMMARY

What it is	Age-related wear: discs dry and lose height, the facet joints take more load, and spurs can narrow the space for nerve roots and the cord. Many people with the changes feel nothing.
How common	More than 85% of people over 60; neck pain affected 203 million people in 2020, and 50–75% have it again within 1 to 5 years.
Assess	Neck Disability Index (out of 50; a 5–point change is real), reflexes and gait, and how and on what the patient sleeps. Image only for nerve or cord signs.
First line	Keep moving, simple painkillers, strengthening of the neck, shoulders and upper back (moderate-quality evidence), and one low, firm pillow matched to the sleep position.
Don't	Weeks in a soft collar, stacked pillows, keeping the neck still, or sleeping on the front.
Refer	999 for new walking problems, bladder or bowel change or sudden loss of co-ordination; urgent GP for arm or leg heaviness or weakness, pins and needles with neck or arm pain, or pain between the shoulder blades.

SLEEP SET-UP

Frido Ultra Slim Deep Sleep Pillow ₹1,499

₹3,299

Ultimate Cervical Pillow for side sleepers. Sets a lower, level neck angle for back sleepers. It doesn't touch the wear itself, and no study has tested this pillow.



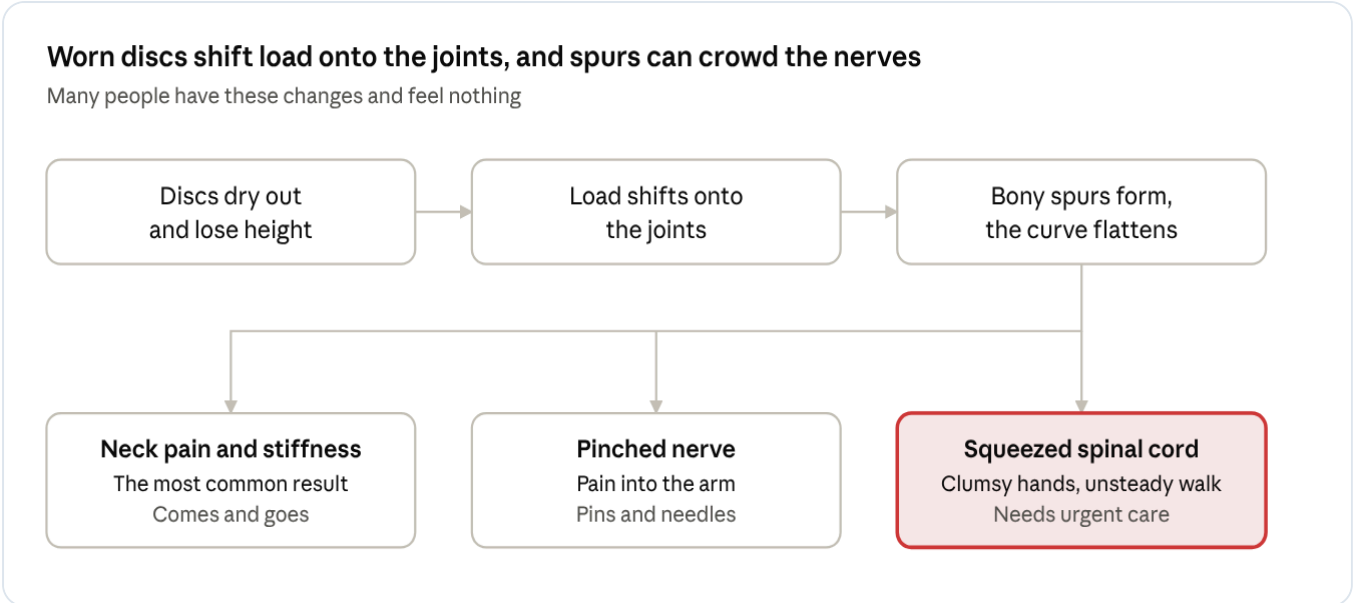
Patient view

Scan to open, or send it to your patient: the 1:42 video, home plan and safety-net in plain words.

01 What cervical spondylosis is

With age, the discs between the neck bones dry out, weaken and lose height, and the facet joints behind them wear the way a knee does ([AAOS OrthoInfo](#)). The body adds bony spurs, which can narrow the space for the nerve roots

and spinal cord, and the cervical curve flattens as load shifts onto the joints (AAOS OrthoInfo; Physiopedia). Many people have these changes and feel nothing (NHS).



How spondylosis develops: from worn discs to three possible results. Arm symptoms, clumsy hands or an unsteady gait mean a nerve root or the cord is involved.

Typical signs: neck and shoulder pain or stiffness that comes and goes, and headaches that start at the back of the neck (NHS).

02 How it affects the patient

85%+ of people over 60 have the wear (AAOS OrthoInfo); neck pain affected 203 million people worldwide in 2020 (GBD 2021, via Kolling Institute)

It tends to return: 50% to 75% of people have neck pain again within 1 to 5 years (Physiopedia, on Carroll 2008). In 100 patients at a Kerala hospital, cases peaked at ages 40 to 49 and men outnumbered women (Bist 2018). Spurs on a nerve root send pain and pins and needles into the arm; pressure on the cord can make the hands clumsy and the gait unsteady (Physiopedia).

03 Score the neck before blaming the pillow

The Neck Disability Index scores 10 daily tasks from 0 (no trouble) to 5 (can't do it), for a total out of 50 (Physiopedia).

TASK	SCORE (0–5)	TASK	SCORE (0–5)
Pain intensity		Headaches	
Personal care		Concentration	
Lifting		Work	
Reading		Driving	
Sleeping		Recreation	

Bands: 0–4 none, 5–14 mild, 15–24 moderate, 25–34 severe, 35–50 complete (Physiopedia, on MacDermid 2009). Re-score after two weeks; a drop of 5 points or more is more than measurement noise (Physiopedia).

04 Why it happens

Age drives the wear; the other rows speed it up or make it hurt more ([AAOS OrthoInfo](#)).

CAUSE	WHAT IT DOES	THE CLUE
Ageing discs and joints	Discs flatten; the joints take more load	Over 40, with stiffness that comes and goes (NHS)
Past neck injury or family history	Raises the risk at any age	An old whiplash or fall, or parents with neck trouble (NHS)
Repetitive neck work	Loads the neck joints	A job spent looking up, down or turning (AAOS OrthoInfo)
Smoking	Clearly linked to more neck pain	The patient smokes (AAOS OrthoInfo)
Pillow at the wrong height	Sets the neck's angle for the whole night	Pain and stiffness worst on waking (Pang 2021)

05 How it's diagnosed

Examine the neck and shoulders, check reflexes and watch the patient walk; X-rays or scans only if the symptoms call for them ([NHS](#)). A scan alone can't settle it: nearly half of middle-aged and older adults have worn discs that cause no pain ([AAOS OrthoInfo](#)).

OFTEN CALLED	WHAT IT MIGHT BE	WHAT POINTS TO IT
"Spondylitis" after 40	Cervical spondylosis	Neck pain or stiffness that comes and goes, and headaches from the back of the neck (NHS)
"Spondylitis" in a teen or young adult	Ankylosing spondylitis, an inflammatory disease	Back pain and stiffness building over months, swollen joints and extreme tiredness (NHS)
"A pinched nerve"	Pressure on a nerve root or the cord	Pins and needles or weakness in an arm, clumsy hands or an unsteady gait (NHS ; Physiopedia)

06 Fixing it: the options

The wear won't reverse, but treatment usually settles the pain within a few weeks, and it can return ([NHS](#)). Three quick fixes backfire:

- **A soft collar worn for weeks:** long-term use may weaken the neck muscles ([AAOS OrthoInfo](#); [UH Sussex NHS](#)).
- **Stacking pillows:** avoid more than two; the NHS advises one low, firm pillow ([UH Sussex NHS](#); [NHS](#)).
- **Keeping the neck still:** keep it moving unless a doctor says otherwise ([NHS](#)).

Four routes ease the pain; none reverses the wear

Goal: less pain and stiffness, and a neck that keeps moving

Exercise, physio

Strengthen neck, shoulders, upper back
Physio if no better in a few weeks

Moderate evidence

Medicines

Paracetamol or ibuprofen
Muscle relaxants for long-term pain

NSAIDs first-line

Sleep set-up

One low, firm pillow
Head level with your body

Mixed evidence

Specialist care

Surgery, only for a pinched nerve or cord pressure

Not always a cure

NHS order: keep moving and use painkillers, physio after a few weeks, surgery last

The four treatment routes. Exercise has the strongest evidence; a pillow belongs to the sleep set-up.

ROUTE	OPTIONS	WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS
Exercise and physio	Neck, shoulder and upper-back strengthening	A moderate to large drop in chronic neck pain (moderate-quality evidence); stretching alone may not help (Cochrane , Gross 2015)
Medicines	Paracetamol or ibuprofen; muscle relaxants for long-term pain	NSAIDs are first-line for neck pain (AAOS OrthoInfo ; NHS)
Heat, massage, traction	Short-term comfort	Not enough evidence in neck pain (Physiopedia , on the Philadelphia Panel)
Sleep set-up	One low, firm pillow that keeps the head level	Some pillow designs cut waking pain and disability in chronic neck pain (Pang 2021); in a pilot trial in spondylosis, no pillow changed any outcome (Gordon 2019)
Injections and surgery	For nerve root or cord pressure	Surgery may stop symptoms getting worse, but isn't always a cure (NHS)

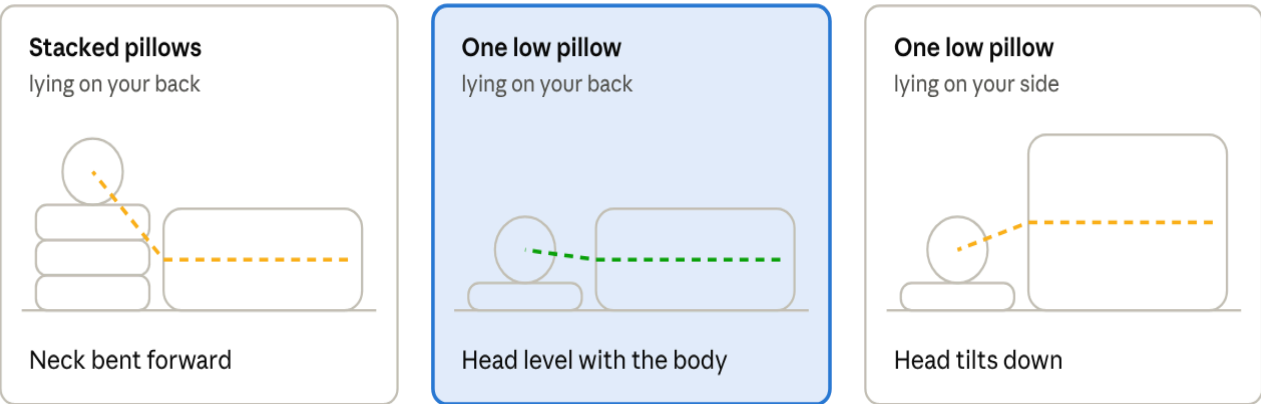
NHS order: movement and painkillers first, physio after a few weeks, surgery only for nerve or cord pressure ([NHS](#)).

07 Where a low pillow fits

It belongs to the sleep set-up route. The Frido Ultra Slim Deep Sleep Pillow is a flat, 50.6 mm gel memory foam pillow sold for back and stomach sleepers ([product page](#)). On the back, a pillow this low keeps the head close to level with the body, as the NHS advice on one low, firm pillow intends ([NHS](#)).

One low pillow keeps your head level on your back, not on your side

The dashed line follows the line of the spine



Pillow height and the line of the neck: a low pillow suits back sleepers, not side sleepers.

	DEFAULT Ultra Slim Deep Sleep Pillow	Ultimate Cervical Pillow
Price (MRP)	₹1,499 ₹3,299	₹1,199 ₹2,500
Build	100% gel memory foam, flat, bamboo-infused cover	Memory foam, contoured, two usable sides
Height	50.6 mm, not adjustable	125 mm, with a lower second side
Sleep position	Back and stomach	Back, side and combination
Rating	4.9/5 (7 reviews)	Not listed

Prices as listed on myfrido.com on 16 Oct 2026; check the product page for today's price.

What it doesn't do: it can't reverse disc wear or free a pinched nerve, it isn't made for side sleeping, and the NHS advises against sleeping on the front with neck pain (NHS).

08 Does it solve the main problem?

VERDICT: PARTLY · EVIDENCE: WEAK

It can set a better neck angle for back sleepers, but it doesn't touch the wear itself, and no study has tested this pillow.

PART OF THE PROBLEM	SOLVED?	WHY
Disc and joint wear	No	Age-related wear doesn't reverse (AAOS OrthoInfo)
Neck angle when sleeping on the back	Yes	A low, firm pillow keeps the head level, as the NHS advises (NHS)
Waking pain and stiffness	Partly	Some pillows cut waking pain in neck pain (Pang 2021); none helped in a spondylosis pilot trial (Gordon 2019)
Neck angle when sleeping on the side	No	Sold for back and stomach sleepers (product page)

PART OF THE PROBLEM	SOLVED?	WHY
A pinched nerve or cord pressure	No	Needs a clinician's assessment (NHS)

Can say: a low, 50.6 mm gel memory foam pillow for back sleepers, in line with the NHS advice on one low, firm pillow. **Can't say:** treats or cures spondylitis or spondylosis, eliminates morning neck pain, prevents headaches or migraines, or "clinically proven".

09 Which pillow to choose

Back sleepers: the Ultra Slim, if the head sits level on a low pillow. **Side sleepers:** the taller, contoured Ultimate Cervical Pillow. **Make it work:** one pillow only, someone checks that the head lines up with the body, 7 to 14 nights to settle in ([product page](#)), then re-score the NDI.

In the Frido Care app, add a pillow to the plan only when your findings call for one; you accept, edit or drop every suggestion.

10 Assessment, referral and plan

Assess: the Neck Disability Index, reflexes and gait, and how and on what the patient sleeps ([NHS](#); [Physiopedia](#)).

Refer urgently. New problems walking, loss of bladder or bowel control or a sudden lack of co-ordination need 999; heaviness or weakness in the arms or legs, pins and needles with neck or arm pain, or pain between the shoulder blades need an urgent GP appointment ([NHS](#)).

SETTLE Weeks 0–2

- Keep moving, painkillers if needed, one low pillow matched to the sleep position ([NHS](#)).

RESTORE Weeks 2–6

- Neck, shoulder and upper-back strengthening: [chin tucks](#), [isometric holds](#), [shoulder rolls](#); physio if it isn't improving ([Cochrane](#), [Gross 2015](#); [NHS](#)).

REVIEW Week 6 on

- Re-score the NDI; image or refer only for nerve or cord signs ([NHS](#)).

11 Talking to the patient

Explain it in plain words

"Your neck has some wear, like most people your age. A pillow can't undo that, but the right height stops your neck sitting bent all night, and the exercises keep it moving."

Their nightly set-up

One low, firm pillow with the head level with the body. No stacked pillows, no soft collar to bed, and not on the front ([NHS](#); [UH Sussex NHS](#)).

Send the patient view

The patient view has the explainer, the neck score, the five exercises, the nightly set-up and the safety-net in plain words, and leaves out everything clinical. Send it with **Send to patient** at the top of this page.

Safety-net every patient: come back sooner for pins and needles or weakness in an arm, clumsy hands or trouble walking ([NHS](#)).

12 Exercises and routines that help

EXERCISE	HOW MUCH	DEMO	HOW-TO
Chin tuck (chin straight back)	Hold 5–10 seconds	Watch	CHT NHS: neck strength and stability
Side bend (ear to shoulder)	Hold 5 seconds, 5 each side	Watch	Royal Wolverhampton NHS: neck exercises
Head turn (look over each shoulder)	Hold 5 seconds, 5 each side	Watch	Royal Wolverhampton NHS: neck exercises
Isometric holds (push into your hand without moving)	Hold 5–10 seconds	Watch	CHT NHS: neck strength and stability
Shoulder rolls	Both directions, 5 times	Watch	Royal Wolverhampton NHS: neck exercises

Strengthening the neck, shoulders and upper back has the best evidence, while stretching alone may not help ([Cochrane](#), [Gross 2015](#)). Move only until you feel a stretch, never into severe pain ([Royal Wolverhampton NHS](#)).

Sources

- [Cervical spondylosis \(arthritis of the neck\)](#), AAOS OrthoInfo
- [Cervical spondylosis](#), NHS
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- [Ankylosing spondylitis](#), NHS
- [Cervical spondylosis](#), Physiopedia
- [Neck Disability Index](#), Physiopedia
- [GBD 2021 neck pain study \(Lancet Rheumatology 2024\)](#), Kolling Institute
- [Cervical spondylosis: analysis of clinical and radiological correlation](#), Bist PKR et al. International Surgery Journal, 2018
- [The effects of pillow designs on neck pain, waking symptoms, neck disability, sleep quality and spinal alignment in adults: a systematic review and meta-analysis](#), Clinical Biomechanics, 2021 (PolyU research page)

10. Pillow preferences of people with neck pain and known spinal degeneration: a pilot randomised controlled trial, Gordon SJ et al. European Journal of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine, 2019 (PEDro record)
11. Exercises for mechanical neck disorders, Gross A et al. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, 2015
12. Self-treatment of acute neck pain, University Hospitals Sussex NHS, 2025
13. Video exercises for neck pain, Chartered Society of Physiotherapy
14. Neck pain exercise videos, Patient.info
15. Neck strength and stability exercises, Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS
16. Neck exercises, Royal Wolverhampton NHS
17. Product pages: Ultra Slim Deep Sleep Pillow, Ultimate Cervical Pillow, myfrido.com, 16 Oct 2026

Frido Care Academy is written for physiotherapists and doctors. This guide summarises published evidence to support, not replace, clinical judgement. Online version with the patient explainer and exercise demos: <https://care.myfrido.com/academy/cervical-spondylosis/>