Neck Muscles and Fasciae Encyclopedia Article

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Neck Muscles and Fasciae

The neck is a well-supported structure. A variety of muscles provide the firm attachment necessary for the safe support of the head, yet permit the flexibility needed for the neck to move from side-to-side and in an up-and-down motion. Additionally, the connective **tissue** fasciae protect and strengthen the neck. The supporting muscles and fasciae are compressed into a narrow area, so as to provide stability and flexibility while at the same time accommodating the various functional routes that pass through the neck, such as the air passage, food passage, **blood** vessels, and nerves.

At the front of the neck, strap muscles connect the neck to the **sternum** (the shoulder blade region). There are also muscular attachments to the tongue and the jaw, enabling the movements associated with speech and food processing in the mouth. A pair of muscles called the sternocleidomastoid is positioned on the right and left front lower regions of the neck, where they fan out to the shoulders.

The back of the neck is heavily layered with muscles. Two large, triangular-shaped trapezius muscles fan out over the shoulders from the upper neck. Another pair of muscles, called the splenii, point downward in a "V" shape. A pair of semispinalis capilis muscles are oriented similar to the splenii, but are narrower and more vertically arranged. The semispinalis cervicis pair, which has an inverted "V" shape, attaches the lower portion of the neck to the upper back. Along the long axis of the back of the neck are a series of short muscles. The multifidi radiate outward at a downward angle, while rotatores are at right angles to the long axis.

Fasciae is thickened connective tissue that is wrapped around muscles or groups of muscles. It provides protection and increased strength. The neck is also rich in so-called deep fascia and cervical fasciae, which are particularly dense layers of connective tissue fiber. The neck fascia extends some distance away from the neck, becoming continuous with fascia of the shoulders, chest, upper arms, and back.

The importance of the neck muscles becomes especially evident when these muscles, particularly those in the back of the neck, become fatigued or damaged. The resulting stiffness and **pain** can be pronounced and can require physiotherapeutic intervention to relieve the discomfort.