

Neck Exercises for Youth Football

Many youths have a lot of sedentary time – video games, TV, reading, class time, etc. Their necks are not generally strengthened sufficiently for aggressive demands of football, wrestling, lacrosse, soccer, etc. New studies indicate that stronger neck muscles could reduce the possibility of concussions and/or TBI.

We recommend the following conditioning exercises for your youth player for at least a 4-week (ideally 6-8 week) period prior to full contact. The below exercises are not intended to resolve or completely prevent the possibility of concussions or TBI. Proper technique and learning to not use the head to initiate contact are critical to reducing the possibility. The exercises are a basic strength regimen for youth. Many studies indicate that excessive weight training in youth could have detrimental effects on musculoskeletal development. **Do not over exercise the player's muscular system while performing these exercises. If any pain or symptoms persist, stop immediately and consult your doctor. Please discuss any questions or concerns directly with your health care professional.**

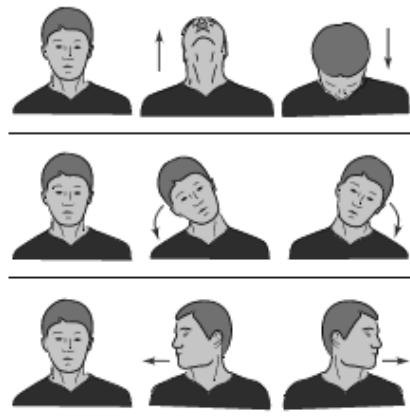
There are 4 basic directions to strengthen – 1) Neck Flexion (pulling chin down); 2) Neck Extension (lifting chin high); 3) Lateral Flexion (left and right); 4) Rotation (left and right)

The exercises should be done as 2-3 sets of 15-20 repetitions. Begin with just the weight of the player's head and add the helmet as strength increases (usually after 1-2 weeks). After the helmet is added, the repetitions will decrease substantially, but will increase over time. Plan 2 days per week for all exercises and allow 2-3 days between for recovery.

Ideally, all exercises are completed on a couch, ottoman, bed, etc., where the neck can move through a full range of motion. Position the body with the player's shoulders even with the edge of the bed. If performing exercises 2 or 3, then the arm(s) should be draped over the side of the couch/bed/etc. so the weight is resting on the trunk of the body, and not on the shoulder.

EXERCISE 1 – Neck Flexion (6-7 minutes)

Lay on back with shoulders even with edge of bed/couch/etc. (image shows floor but not ideal). The head should be able to extend all the way back without being impeded. Bring the chin all the way to touch the chest and return to the fully extended position. It should be a 2 count up and down – 2 seconds to bring chin to chest and 2 seconds to return to fully extended. Repeat until the player can no longer raise his/her head or after 20 repetitions. Rest one minute and repeat. Once the player can perform 3 sets of 20 without stopping, then the helmet should be used for the exercise.



Head lift: Neck curl

EXERCISE 2 – Neck Extension (6-7 minutes)

Lay on stomach with arms at the side or draped over the end of bed. This can also be done from a "cat" stance (on all fours) as shown. The head should be able to be fully flexed uninhibited when resting. Raise the head all the way back until fully extended. It should be a 2 count up and down – 2 seconds to bring chin fully up and 2 seconds to return to fully flexed (chin to chest). Repeat until the player can no longer raise his/her head or after 20 repetitions. Rest one minute and repeat. Once the player can perform 3 sets of 20 without stopping, then the helmet should be used for the exercise.



Neck extension on hands and knees

EXERCISE 3 – Lateral Flexion (8 minutes)

Lay on the right side with arm draped over side of bed/couch/etc. (not on floor as shown). The head begins in a relaxed position with the right ear close to or touching the right shoulder. Raise the head until fully flexed. The left ear should be close to touching the left shoulder. This is also a 2-count rep. Repeat until the player can no longer raise his/her head or after 20 repetitions. Roll to left side and repeat. Once the player can perform 3 sets of 20 without stopping, then the helmet should be used for the exercise.



Head lift: Neck side bend

Exercise 4 – Rotation (8 minutes)

In a standing or seated position and with the helmet on, use the right hand to grip the face mask of the helmet. While rotating the head to the left, provide resistance with the right arm. The resistance should be enough to almost stop the head from rotating, but light enough that the head can rotate all the way through the range of motion. Return to the starting position by using more force in the right arm than the neck can overcome. Make sure the player isn't rotating in the trunk/core area. The shoulders should remain in a fixed location. This will keep tension on the muscle and continue to strengthen the rotational complex. This is also a 2 count rep. Repeat for 10-15 repetitions. Switch arms and repeat on the left side. 3 Sets of 10-15 reps.



These exercises are recommended, and not mandatory, to play for East Chatham Chargers. They should be performed while the athlete is being observed by a parent to ensure proper execution. While these exercises are intended to help reduce the potential of concussion and TBI, no exercise or equipment can completely remove the risk of concussion, TBI or other physical injury or death from sports of all kinds. It is advised that the parent be aware of the player limitations and communicate those limitations to coaches and organization staff. Your player's safety is our top priority. Do not hesitate to communicate concerns.