



### **Brachial Plexus Stretch**

**Definition:** A brachial plexus (group of nerves bundled together) stretch involves a stretching of a group of nerves that are located in the neck and travel down the arm.

**Common Terms:** Most people know this injury as a “burner” or “stinger”.

**Typical Mechanism of Injury:** It is believed the brachial plexus is stretched when a person’s head side bends in one direction while the rest of the body moves in another direction. This is seen in contact sports such as football, when a person lands on the shoulder blade, forcing the shoulder/body down in one direction and possibly having the head move the opposite way. It can also occur in automobile accidents.

**Common Signs and Symptoms:** Burning, stinging, numbness, tingling, stiffness, and decreased strength or weakness are all possible symptoms that one might experience in different aspects of the entire upper limb, from the neck to the fingers. A person may complain of a “dead arm” sensation, because these signs and symptoms typically shoot down the arm. Both the severity of the stretch, as well as which specific nerve is actually stretched, will determine the extent, type and location of symptoms that a person experiences.

**Common Treatment:** Treatment varies based upon the extent of the injury. Nerve damage responds in different ways and a thorough assessment should be performed prior to initiating any formal rehabilitation. Exercises to promote range of motion and especially strengthening of the neck and shoulder muscles will likely be started once it is determined safe to perform from your physician. In some cases, it will be recommended to wear additional protection in the form of pads or collars for a continuation of activity or sport.

**Prevention:** A brachial plexus injury may be prevented by stretching and strengthening the neck muscles. Use of proper equipment, like shock absorbing shoulder pads and cervical collar rolls, can also be of benefit, as well as using proper technique during sport activities such as tackling in football.

**Expectations:** This injury can take days to months to recover from based upon the extent of the nerve involvement. Muscle weakness and possible changes of sensation may linger and limit one’s ability to perform daily tasks.

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