

How the VA Rates Neck Pain (Cervical Strain)

Regulatory Source: 38 CFR § 4.71a – Diagnostic Codes 5237, 5242

VA Source: <https://ecfr.gov>

Summary:

Neck pain (often called cervical strain or degenerative arthritis) is rated by how much your movement is limited and whether there is spinal fusion or muscle guarding that causes abnormal posture.

VA Rating Table:

Rating	Explanation
10%	Forward flexion of the cervical spine greater than 30° but not greater than 40°, or combined range of motion greater than 170° but not greater than 335°.
20%	Forward flexion of the cervical spine greater than 15° but not greater than 30°, or combined range of motion not greater than 170°, or muscle spasm or guarding severe enough to result in abnormal spinal contour.
30%	Forward flexion of the cervical spine 15° or less, or favorable ankylosis of the entire cervical spine.
40%	Unfavorable ankylosis of the entire cervical spine.
100%	Unfavorable ankylosis of the entire spine (both cervical and thoracolumbar).

Required Evidence:

- Diagnosis of cervical strain, arthritis, or disc degeneration
- C&P; exam or physical therapy range-of-motion testing
- Imaging such as MRI or X-ray (optional but helpful)
- Documentation of muscle spasms, guarding, or posture changes
- Statements showing daily impact (e.g., driving, lifting, turning head)

Pro Tip:

Neck pain can lead to radiculopathy in the arms or hands. Always document nerve symptoms like tingling or weakness to claim secondary ratings.