

Whiplash

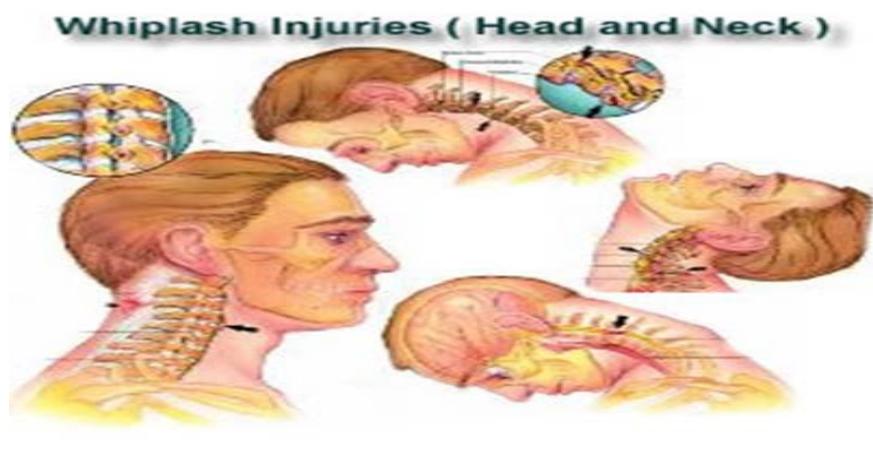
A whiplash neck sprain occurs when your head is suddenly jolted backwards and forwards in a whip-like movement, or is suddenly forcibly rotated. This can cause some neck muscles and ligaments to stretch more than normal (sprain).

The common cause is when you are in a car that is hit from the front, back or side. Less commonly, a whiplash neck sprain can occur after a sporting injury, or even with everyday activities such as jolting the neck when you trip or fall.

What are the symptoms of whiplash?

- Pain and stiffness in the neck. It may take several hours after the accident for symptoms to appear. The pain and stiffness often become worse on the day after the accident. In about half of cases, the pain first develops the day after the accident.
- Turning or bending the neck may be difficult.
- You may also feel pain or stiffness in the shoulders or down the arms.
- There may be pain and stiffness in the upper and lower part of the back.
- Headache is a common symptom.
- Dizziness, blurred vision, pain in the jaw or pain on swallowing, unusual sensations of the facial skin may occur for a short while, but soon go. Tell your doctor if any of these persist.
- Some people feel tired and irritable for a few days and find it difficult to concentrate.

Damage to the spine or spinal cord sometimes occurs from a severe whiplash accident. This is uncommon and is not dealt with in this article. This article deals only with the common whiplash sprain to neck muscles and ligaments. It assumes you have been assessed by a doctor and serious neck injury had been ruled out.



How is whiplash neck sprain diagnosed?

Your doctor or physiotherapist will usually be able to diagnose a whiplash neck sprain from the description of the way the accident occurred, the typical symptoms and by examining your neck and arms for signs of tenderness and stiffness.

What are the treatments for a whiplash neck sprain?

- Painkillers and anti-inflammatory painkillers are often helpful. See your doctor or pharmacist for more advice on which medicines to take.
- A good posture may help. Check that your sitting position at work or at the computer is not poor.
- A firm supporting pillow seems to help some people when sleeping. Try not to use more than one pillow.
- Physiotherapy including mobilisation, advice on the use of heat and exercises.
- Exercise your neck and keep active. Aim to keep your neck moving as normally as possible – every few hours during the day so it doesn't stiffen up. At first the pain may be bad, and you may need to rest your neck for a day or so but as far as possible continue with normal activities after this. You will not cause damage to your neck by moving it.

There is no clear-cut evidence about the best way to treat an acute whiplash injury because most of the studies that have been carried out to date have been of poor quality. However, most healthcare professionals agree that active interventions, such as neck exercises and keeping the neck mobile, are better than inactive interventions, such as resting the neck and keeping it still by using a neck brace or collar.

What is the outlook (prognosis) after a whiplash neck sprain?

This will depend on the severity of the sprain, but the outlook is good in most cases. Symptoms often begin to improve after a few days. Most people make a full recovery within a few weeks. However, in a small number of people, some symptoms persist long-term.

www.patient.co.uk/health/Whiplash-Neck-Sprains.htm

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