

Driving

To drive safely, you must be able to turn your head quickly. It is best not to drive until severe pain or stiffness has settled. Discuss with your insurance company and GP when it is safe and legal for you to drive again.

Persistent pain

Pain can be persistent for a number of reasons:

- no early movement
- anxiety or depression
- previous neck problems.

Keeping the neck moving regularly with exercise is proven to be the best way of getting better quickly.

More information

For up to date service information please see our website.

Further advice, self management videos and information leaflets can be found on our website. www.whittington.nhs.uk/msk

<http://www.csp.org.uk/your-health/conditions/neck-pain>

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/whiplash/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

<http://www.arthritisresearchuk.org/arthritis-information/conditions/neck-pain/neck-pain-exercises.aspx>

Whiplash

A patient's guide

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What is whiplash?

A whiplash is a neck sprain that occurs when your head is jolted quickly backwards and forwards in a whip-like movement. This can cause neck muscles and ligaments to strain more than normal. Whiplash neck sprains are common. The injury most commonly occurs after a sudden impact like a road traffic accident.

Symptoms

The most frequent complaints are:

- pain
- headaches
- stiffness in the neck.

The risk of long-term problems is very small and the chances for complete recovery are good. However, whiplash is still a strain injury and, as with other strain injuries, it is not unusual for the pain to last for a few months or even longer.

Symptoms of whiplash do not always appear immediately when the injury occurs. It may take hours for the symptoms to show and they may continue to get worse in the days after the injury. They usually pass after a few days or weeks.

Often the pain can flare up from time to time before it goes completely.

Other symptoms can include:

- muscle spasms
- dizziness
- nausea.

Medication

Take a painkiller such as paracetamol or an anti-inflammatory such as ibuprofen, to reduce the pain and swelling. If symptoms persist, your GP can prescribe stronger painkillers.

Heat

The use of heat (i.e. a hot water bottle) will help the tissues to relax. This is helpful to do for about 20 minutes, both before and after stretching exercises.

Avoid the use of hot packs if you are unable to detect the difference between hot and cold over the affected area.

Be careful not to have the hot pack too hot as it is easy to get burnt.

Exercise

Regular gentle stretches of the neck are important to allow healing to the damaged tissues. They improve blood flow, healing of tissues and health of the joint. They also maintain movement and flexibility. If the neck remains in one position it will become even more stiff and painful to move.

These exercises should be carried out little and often (every hour). Roll your shoulders forwards and backwards. Hunch shoulders to ears and relax. Move your neck slowly in all directions and hold for 10 seconds. This may cause a stretching pain, this is normal.

Sleep

There are no fixed rules when it comes to sleeping. Just find a position that is comfortable, supported by pillows if necessary.

Advice

Research has shown that whiplash patients who rest for several weeks and wear a soft collar actually recover more slowly than those who follow a normal routine and keep the neck moving. We know that worrying can also slow down your recovery.