

WHIPLASH

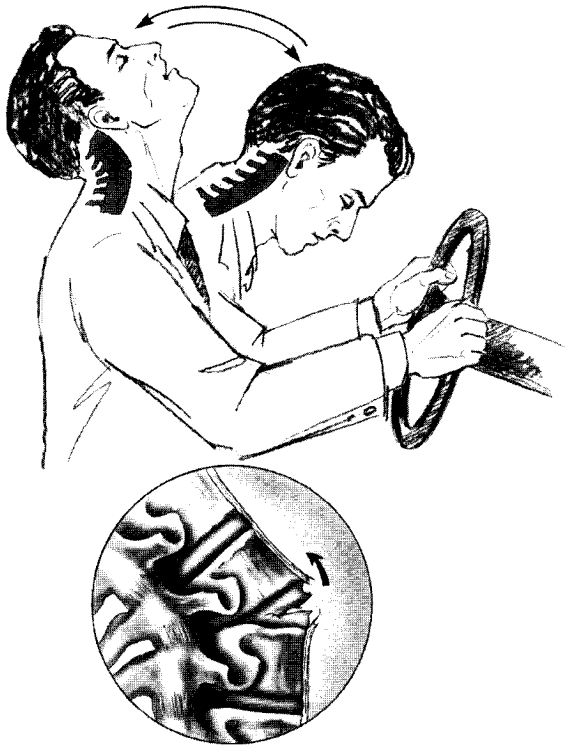


Diagram A: *Whiplash injury*

What is whiplash?

Whiplash is a term used to describe an injury to the soft tissues—the muscles, ligaments and the nerves—of your neck. Whiplash can be caused by any injury in which the neck is “whipped” forward. Many people suffer whiplash after being in a car accident, especially if they are hit from behind. When a car is rear-ended, it is suddenly pushed forward at a high speed. This causes individuals in the car to have their necks first thrown backwards and then “whipped” forward. This can stretch and tear the soft tissues in the neck which then become swollen and cause pain. Muscle spasms are common and painful and can cause pain as far down as the upper back and can trigger headaches. Nerve injuries in your neck can also cause your arms to feel weak or numb.

In order to treat your whiplash, your doctor will try to find the muscles that are damaged or in spasm and measure how much you can move your neck. You may have a neck x-ray to detect fractures. He or she can also tell if you have injured any nerves by doing different tests.

Treatment options

The pain from whiplash is often intense at first and this might cause you to be anxious about your chances for recovery. Make sure to ask your doctor any questions which are bothering you in order to alleviate any anxiety you may have. There are different types of treatment that are used to help reduce the pain from your neck injury. Your doctor will help you decide which of the following treatment options is best for you.

Non-drug treatments. Neck exercises. Do not

attempt to exercise your neck while the pain is severe. After the pain has subsided, and with your doctor's direction, it

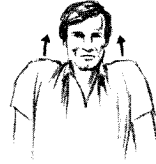
is important to exercise the neck area so that you can increase your strength and speed up your healing time.

Diagram C:
Touch ears to shoulder without lifting shoulder. Repeat 10 times.



Rotate head in circle. Repeat 10 times.

Diagram B:
Shrug shoulders up tight. Hold 5 seconds, release. Repeat 5 times.



1. Stretching exercises

may reduce muscle spasms and make it easier for you to move your neck. Normally, muscles and ligaments are quite elastic, but when injured, they heal with scar tissue, which is neither as stretchy or as strong as normal muscles and ligaments. For some good stretching exercises, see Diagrams B and C.

2. Strengthening

exercises improve the way the neck muscles heal. Muscles which are stronger usually

have fewer muscle spasms. Try the strengthening exercises in Diagrams D, E and F.

Diagram D:

Hold head erect and put hand on forehead. Push head against hand and hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 10 times. Repeat with hand on back of head.

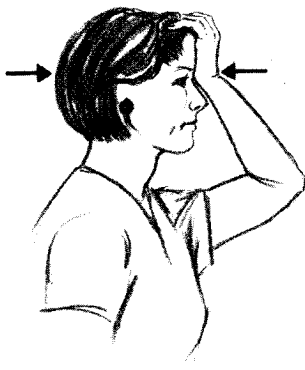


Diagram E: Hold head erect. Push hard against temple trying to turn head against pressure of hand. Hold 5 seconds. Repeat 10 times to each side.

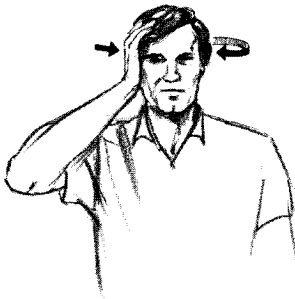
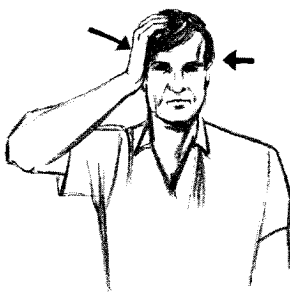


Diagram F: Push hard against temple, trying to push head towards shoulder against pressure of hand. Hold 5 seconds. Repeat 10 times to each side.

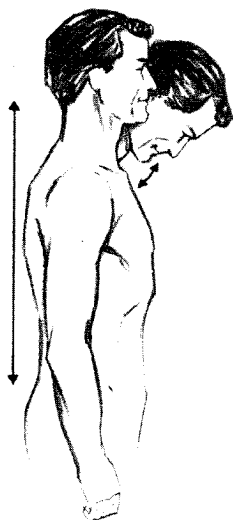


Posture. Many people have poor posture. Sitting slumped forward causes your neck to be pushed forward rather than being centered over your shoulders and puts a lot of stress on your neck muscles. This may not cause neck pain in normal people, but if you have an injured neck it will make the pain worse. Watch your posture. Chin tuck exercises (Diagram G on next page) and back supports can help improve your sitting posture.

Physical fitness and therapy. Many people become inactive after this type of injury. People who are more fit will heal faster. Walking, biking or swimming for about 30 minutes three times a week will help keep you fit.

If you have a severe injury, a physiotherapist can also help. A physiotherapist may use heat and/or cold therapy to reduce pain and spasm.

Diagram G:
Tuck chin
as far as
possible,
straighten
neck and
or rear back
Balance
head over
body.
Repeat
10 times.



Neck supports or collars used to be very popular, but now are considered useful for only short-term (7-10 days) treatment. A special pillow that supports the neck properly at nighttime is better.

Drug treatments. Your doctor may prescribe pain relievers such as ASA or nonsteroidal antiinflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and/or muscle relaxants in order to eliminate the pain and reduce the inflammation caused by the whiplash.

Whatever the treatment, it is important to follow your doctor's advice and directions carefully to treat your whiplash pain successfully.

How long will the pain last?

The time it takes for you to heal depends partly on how badly you were hurt. Some minor neck pain may heal in a few days. Most people will recover completely, although some symptoms may not go away for a while after the accident. Your symptoms will become less painful with time. Your neck pain may be made worse by doing things which involve a lot of neck rotation or by doing things which leave your neck partially bent, such as reading, studying, or knitting. It is important that you exercise your neck as you recover because a lack of exercise can make your neck pain last longer.

*Patient information developed for Syntex Inc.
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