

Whiplash and Car Accident Injury



Whiplash is the term used to describe neck pain and injury after an accident. It's actually the spraining of your neck's soft tissues (ligaments, tendons, muscles, discs, and small joints) and can occur in car accidents, sporting activities, and accidental falls. Symptoms can include neck pain, stiffness, and headaches, and sometimes radiating pain to the shoulder blades and arms. The amount of pain and stiffness varies between people and the type of injury. Turning your head or looking up (i.e. driving, working at a computer) can all be painful and restricted.

Causes of Whiplash

Whiplash is caused by a sudden violent jerking of the neck. Experts agree that whiplash causes injury to muscles, ligaments, tendons, discs, and small joints of the spine. Fortunately, most whiplash injuries aren't serious and often recover in a few weeks. A small percentage of people can have a persisting symptoms that last several months but more serious injuries (i.e., fractures, nerve injuries) are not common.



Your Physiotherapist will:

1. Ask questions and observe how your neck is aligned, moves, and where it hurts
2. Screen out more serious injuries that require medical follow-up
3. Examine the area, test range of motion, muscle strength, and perform special tests that assess nerve function
4. Develop a treatment plan tailored to you, depending on the situation and time since the accident

How Physiotherapists Help

Physiotherapists are highly skilled at examining and treating whiplash. Research shows that getting your neck moving soon after injury speeds up recovery. Rest can cause more stiffness, increased muscle weakness, and delayed recovery. Physiotherapists can help you improve your neck's strength and movement. Treatment may include:

- Education in posture and positioning to manage pain
- Specific exercises to reduce pain and restore mobility and strength
- Manual therapy treatments to reduce pain and restore mobility
- Modalities (i.e. acupuncture, electrical stimulation, heat, cold) for temporary pain relief
- Rehabilitation program to safely prepare you to return to normal activity, sport, or work

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