



WHAT IS A WHIPLASH NECK SPRAIN?

A whiplash neck sprain occurs when your head is suddenly jolted backwards and forwards in a whip-like movement usually caused in a motor vehicle accidents normally from a rear-end or side impact scenario. These movements generate considerable force, typically causing the neck to move far beyond the normal range of movement and causes damage to the delicate supporting structures of the neck. Whiplash is effectively a sprain of the joints in the neck and the associated soft tissues.



Whiplash can also result from forceful sporting injuries that cause similar stress to the neck joints, ligaments, muscles and vertebral discs.

WHO GETS WHIPLASH NECK SPRAINS?

Whiplash neck sprains are common. 2 in every 3 people involved in car accidents develop neck pain (with or without other injuries). Many people are surprised with the onset of neck pain following even minor accidents some hours following the accident. Whiplash symptoms often take a couple of days to present. Less commonly, whiplash can result from everyday mishaps such as jolting your neck when you trip or fall.

SYMPTOMS OF WHIPLASH

Whilst the symptoms of whiplash will vary, the following represent the most frequently noticed effects of whiplash:

- Pain in the neck
- Head feels too heavy for the neck
- Neck stiffness and reduced range of motion
- Pain into the shoulders and arms
- Tingling in the arms and fingers



- Dizziness
- Headache
- Blurred vision
- Pain on swallowing
- Irritability and difficulty to concentrate

It is also understandable that some people may feel distressed, anxious following a motor vehicle collision. These feelings can manifest themselves in the above symptoms and will usually settle over time.

Neck x-rays are often taken following a motor vehicle accident to rule out serious pathology including bony fractures and dislocations. X-ray reports will often read 'no abnormality detected' although they do not reveal many soft tissue injuries to the neck and offer little information about pain levels.

TREATMENT FOR WHIPLASH

Physiotherapy management of whiplash is extremely effective. Physiotherapy care initially consists of a thorough history, orthopaedic, neurological and spinal examination to determine the exact location of your neck pain, pain or dysfunction.

Treatment consists of reducing pain and inflammation restoring movement and stabilizing your neck to prevent further damage. Ice is perhaps the best natural anti-inflammatory modality and it is also very soothing when your neck is painful. Some topical anti-inflammatory gels including Voltaren can also be valuable.



If you are able to support your head and neck, it is especially important to keep your neck mobile rather than immobilizing it in a soft cervical collar. Studies have shown that you are more likely to make a quicker recovery if you do regular neck exercises, and keep your neck active rather than resting it for long periods in a collar.



As your pain decreases, and your stability improves, your physiotherapist will massage and gently mobilize your spine to help improve your neck function and reduce nerve pressure.

FURTHER HANDY HINTS:

- Stay active and do as many normal activities as possible
- Don't expose the neck to any unnecessary stress during the initial healing phase (0-72 hours)
- Pain during the initial recover period is rarely associated with further injury and staying active is encouraged. This can be guided with the help of your TPM physiotherapist
- Continue work, even if it initially needs to be at a reduced capacity, as studies show people recover quicker by returning to work and avoiding long-term absenteeism

Some other helpful advice is to avoid poor neck posture during your daily routine and to use a firm supporting contoured pillow when sleeping.

Whiplash responds very well to Physiotherapy treatment, with most people experiencing significant improvement within weeks of beginning care. If you have been in a motor vehicle accident contact us to book an initial assessment.