
Whiplash Recovery

Important Facts I

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What is whiplash?

You can get whiplash if your head is suddenly jolted backwards and forwards in a 'whip-like' movement. The tissues around your neck are overstretched, causing them to be sprained. This type of neck injury often happens in car crashes.

Most everyday road traffic shunts DO NOT cause lasting damage. Doctors can diagnose and treat serious spinal injuries but they do not have a 'quick fix' for whiplash. It is better to accept their reassurance that there is nothing seriously wrong and not to let needless worry delay your recovery. **Once you know it's nothing serious, the best thing you can do is take responsibility for getting yourself better.**

Whiplash is very common

About 1 in 5 people who are involved in a car crash, where their car is hit from behind or from the side, get pain and stiffness in their neck. Pain and stiffness from whiplash usually goes away in a few days or weeks, but occasionally it can last longer.

What are the symptoms of whiplash?

You may have some of the following symptoms within the first two days after your injury, or symptoms may start later:

- ◆ Painful and stiff neck ◆
- Headaches
- ◆ Jaw pain
- ◆ Pain in your shoulder or between your shoulder blades ◆
- Low back pain
- ◆ Shooting pains and tingling in your arm and hand
- ◆ Dizziness, ringing in your ears or blurred vision. You should tell your doctor if these symptoms do not go away quickly
- ◆ Difficulty concentrating and feeling irritable

Warning signs

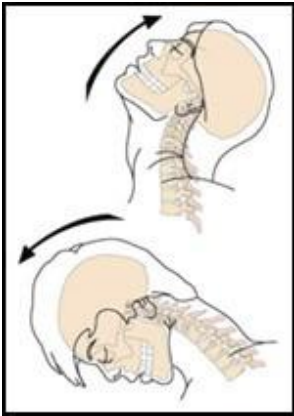
If you have had a violent accident and your neck is very painful you should go to A&E or see your doctor just to check there is no serious damage. This is particularly important if you:

- ◆ Have been unconscious
- ◆ Have blurred vision
- ◆ Have severe neck spasm or your neck is in an abnormal posture
- ◆ Have pins and needles, numbness or weakness in your arms or legs

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- ◆ **Most whiplash injuries are not serious.** There is usually no damage to the bones, discs or nerves in the spine.
- ◆ Pain that develops a day or two after the accident is good. It means no serious harm has been done.
- ◆ Acute symptoms usually settle within a few days to a few weeks so that you can get on with your life.
- ◆ What you do in the early stages is very important. Rest for more than a day or two DOES NOT help and may prolong your pain and disability.
- ◆ **The people who recover fastest from whiplash are those who stay active, exercise their necks and get on with their lives despite pain and stiffness.**
- ◆ Permanent damage from a whiplash injury is rare and the long term outlook is good.
- ◆ Whiplash is known to cause neck pain but can also cause low back pain. There is rarely any serious damage to the low back.
- ◆ Occasionally pain from whiplash can persist or recur for quite a long time. This still does not mean that it is serious. It can be very frustrating but the best thing to do is to get on with your life despite the symptoms. This will help the symptoms to subside.
- ◆ **Your neck is designed for movement. The sooner you get your neck moving and get on with your normal daily activities the sooner you will feel better.**

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Best Management



The new approach to treatment for whiplash is to **KEEP MOVING and this will help you to get better faster**. Even when your neck is sore, it is safe to move and exercise it. Examples of activities you can do include:

- ◆ Simple neck exercises
- ◆ Any form of aerobic exercise ◆

Keep fit

- ◆ Yoga
- ◆ Walking
- ◆ Most daily activities and hobbies



The old fashioned management of rest and wearing a soft collar until the pain has gone is now known to be the worst thing you can do if you have a whiplash injury. Whilst a collar is sometimes given for immediate support and relief, research shows that resting your neck in a collar probably won't help and may delay your recovery.

The most important things to do are:

- ◆ **Keep your neck moving as normally as possible and go about your normal daily activities if you can.**
- ◆ **Take painkillers that you buy in a pharmacy to help with the pain. These are most often effective if you take them regularly, every 4 to 6 hours. Ask the pharmacist for advice if you are not sure what to take.**
- ◆ **Do some extra exercise**



Some people find it is best to exercise the joints that are stiff and sore while others get on better with general exercises for the spine. There are 3 exercise sheets included in this pack; neck exercises, mid back exercises, general back exercises; Following one of these programmes will help your recovery. Chose to follow the one that suits you best or that your physiotherapist advises.

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Pain relief treatments

Treatments for pain relief

People often take medicine to help their pain. Here is some information about the most common types of medications and also other ways that people have found helpful to manage pain.

It is important to be realistic though, as these treatments rarely provide a magic cure. **It is what you do for yourself in getting your neck moving again and getting active that matters most.**

Painkillers

You can buy some painkillers, such as paracetamol, in a pharmacy. Paracetamol is safe if you follow the directions on the package. If you are also on other medications the pharmacist can advise you on what it is best for you to take. Stronger painkillers, such as codeine, can cause nausea, vomiting, drowsiness and constipation. If you take drugs like codeine regularly you are likely to begin needing them in order to feel well (you become dependent on them). This means that if you stop taking them you get withdrawal symptoms.

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)

Drugs such as ibuprofen help pain and reduce inflammation of sore tissue. You can get stomach pains, diarrhoea, skin rashes, headaches and dizziness if you take NSAIDs. There is some evidence that these drugs can help ease back pain.

Muscle relaxants

Drugs that relax your muscles also make you calm and sleepy. They include drugs such as diazepam (brand name Valium). Muscle relaxants can make you feel sick, dizzy or drowsy. It is possible to become dependent on these drugs if you take them for too long. We haven't found any studies on how well these drugs work to help whiplash.

'Hot and cold'

This can be used for short term pain relief. In the first 48 hours a cold pack placed on the sore area for 5 to 10 minutes at a time can be helpful. Some people prefer heat, such as a wheat pack that can be warmed in the microwave or a hot water bottle.

Manipulation or mobilisation

This may help if done by a qualified professional, such as a Chartered Physiotherapist. You should feel the benefit quickly. There is no value in continuing this treatment for months on end. Manipulation and mobilisation work best if they are combined with getting active

Other treatments

Massage, traction, electrotherapy, acupuncture and alternative medicine are used for neck pain and whiplash. If the treatment eases your symptoms and allows you to exercise and move your neck, then it is helpful.

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Posture Advice

Neutral posture



If you have a whiplash injury you will find your neck is more comfortable if you can adopt a neutral posture while going about your normal daily activities.

A neutral posture means that you have 3 natural curves in your back. This means a slight inward curve in the lower back and neck and an outward curve in the middle of your back (the thorax). Your head should be balanced over your shoulders and your shoulders relaxed.

People who are stiff, uncomfortable or in pain often round and hunch their shoulders and stick their chin out. This posture causes stiffness in the spine and tension in the upper back muscles. It can make the whiplash problem feel worse.

A neutral posture in sitting means that you have a slight inward curve in your lower back and your head is balanced over your shoulders. Some people find it helpful to put a small cushion or folded jumper in the small of their back to support and maintain the inward curve

Poor posture



Poor posture

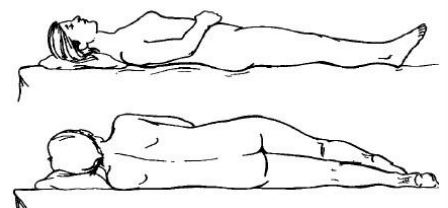


Neutral posture

Sleeping

Sleeping on your stomach is not necessarily bad for you. There is no 'best' position for sleeping. Sleep on a mattress that is firm, yet soft enough to conform to the normal curves of your body.

The pillow should support your neck and allow it to rest in a balanced position. A feather or fibre pillow is best because it conforms to the shape of your neck better than foam.

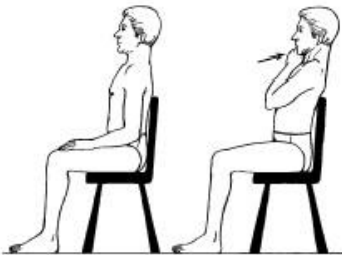


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Neck Exercises

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Chose the exercise sheet that suits you best or that your physiotherapist advises. Always start exercises in a neutral posture and move your neck gently and slowly. Don't force the movement or strain or you may make your muscles feel sore.

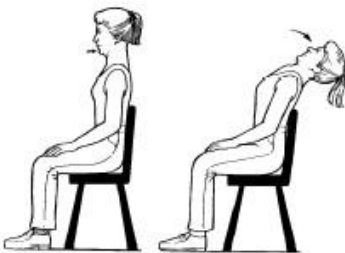


Chin tuck

Sit or stand with good posture.

Tuck chin backwards without tilting head up (making a double chin).

Hold this position for 3 seconds and repeat 3 times.



Neck extension

Sit or stand with good posture.

Tuck chin backwards without tilting head up (as above).

Now bend neck backwards while maintaining the chin tuck until a stretch is felt in the back of your neck.

Hold this position for 3 seconds and repeat 3 times.

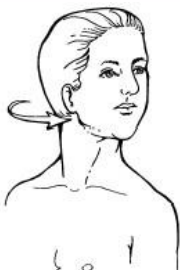


Neck flexion

Sit or stand with good posture.

Bend neck forward as shown.

Hold for 3 seconds and repeat 3 times.



Neck rotation

Sit or stand with good posture.

Turn head to the right and hold for 3 seconds then turn head to the left and hold for 3 seconds.

Repeat 3 times to each side.



Neck side-bending

Sit or stand with good posture.

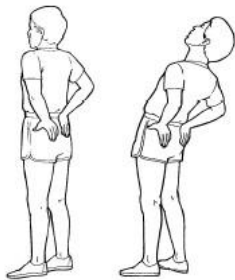
Tilt your head to the right and move your right ear towards your right shoulder and hold for 3 seconds, then tilt your head to the left and move your left ear towards your left shoulder and hold for 3 seconds.

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Mid Back Exercises

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Chose the exercise sheet that suits you best or that your physiotherapist advises. Always start exercises in a neutral posture and move gently and slowly. Don't force the movement or strain or you may make your muscles feel sore.



Back stretch

Place hands firmly against hips as shown. Bend backward until you feel a stretch. Hold for 3 seconds and repeat 3 times.



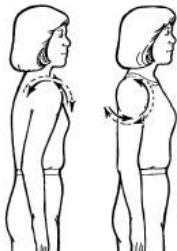
Back side stretch

Sit or stand with hands clasped behind head as shown. Raise tip of right elbow upward as you move tip of other elbow downwards. Hold for 3 seconds. Repeat to the other side. Repeat 3 times.



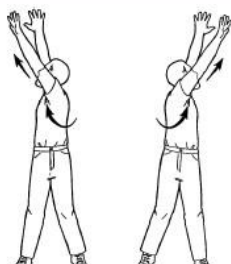
Upward stretch

Stand with arms overhead as shown. Stretch, as though you are trying to make yourself taller and hold for 3 seconds. Do one or two stretches throughout the day when you stand from sitting or after driving.



Shoulder roll

Begin with shoulders relaxed. Slowly rotate shoulders backwards alternately. Continue for one minute.



Trunk twist

Stand with arms overhead as shown. Stretch, as though you are trying to make yourself taller, and turn to the left and hold for 3 seconds. Then stretch and turn to the right and hold for 3 seconds. Repeat 3 times.

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Low Back Exercises

Chose the exercise sheet that suits you best or that your physiotherapist advises. Always start exercises in a neutral posture and move gently and slowly. Don't force the movement or strain or you may make your muscles feel sore.



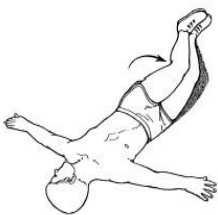
Stand straight with feet apart.
Support your back with your hands while bending your back as far backwards as possible. Keep your knees straight during the exercise.
Repeat 3 times



Sit on a chair with your legs apart.
Bend your head and trunk down between your knees, rounding your upper body as much as possible. Hold for approximately 20 seconds.
Repeat twice



Stand straight with one hand on your hip and the other straight up.
Bend to the side with the opposite arm reaching overhead. Keep your pelvis in mid-position.
Repeat 3 times to each side



Lie on your back with knees bent and feet together, arms out to the side.
Rotate your knees to the right as you turn your head in the opposite direction, repeat to the other side.
Repeat 10 times to each side



Lying on your back, use your arms to pull your knees up towards your chest.
Reach with your forehead towards your knees. Hold for around 5 seconds then relax.
Repeat 5 times



In a crawling position, lift your opposite arm and leg to a horizontal position. Hold for 5 - 10 seconds. Try to keep your body still. Repeat with the other arm and leg.
Repeat 10 times

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Resuming Activity

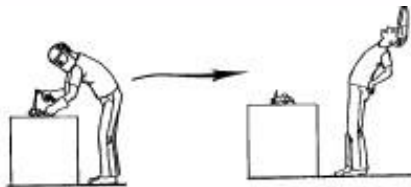
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To get better faster you should try to go about your normal daily activities and if you work you should return to work as soon as possible.

It often helps to discuss the problem with your manager or supervisor if parts of your job are uncomfortable to do. Offer suggestions to overcome these problems for a few days. You should be able to manage most normal activities quite quickly, usually within a couple of weeks. If not, you MUST call the helpline and request additional help to ensure that you become fully active again.

Tips that will help you both at home and at work are:

Sit in a neutral posture. Stand up and walk around for 5 minutes in every hour and STRETCH every 20 minutes. If you work at a computer make sure that you are in a neutral posture with your mouse close to you.



For jobs that require bending and stooping, stretch backwards to ease the strain every 20 minutes.

For lifting and handling tasks always do a risk assessment and use the POWER position. Keep loads that you are lifting and carrying close to your body. If you can, use a trolley rather than carrying for long distances.



Try to adopt a neutral posture to do tasks, such as kneeling to fill the washing machine rather than stooping, as this will help to keep your whole spine healthy.

It is a good idea to remember good posture for recreational activities too.



Keep Fit

The best way to prevent a recurrence of a musculoskeletal problem is to exercise regularly.
The biggest risk from exercise is not starting ...

Benefits of exercise

- ◆ Improves flexibility
- ◆ Improves cardiovascular fitness
- ◆ Improves your immune system
- ◆ Helps control blood pressure ◆

Helps control cholesterol

- ◆ Strengthens muscles
- ◆ Strengthens bones
- ◆ Maintains healthy bones
- ◆ Helps weight control
- ◆ Improves skin tone
- ◆ Improves sleep patterns
- ◆ Increases self-esteem ◆

Aids relaxation

- ◆ Relieves stress
- ◆ Increases productivity

30 minutes of moderate intensity activity or activity that causes small increases in breathing and heart rate is recommended on most, if not all, days of the week.

The activity should involve the large muscle groups (walking, cycling, swimming, dancing, jogging, etc).

For moderate endurance exercise, simply walk a little further each time you exercise and gradually increase the pace of your walks as the weeks pass. For strength exercise, lift a weight that you usually lift but do it more times than usual.

Before beginning an aggressive exercise programme you should see your doctor or an exercise professional for screening tests and programme advice.

The key to success in any exercise programme or plan is to find activities that you enjoy and that you will want to participate in. Once you have found an activity you enjoy it will become much easier to gain the benefits associated with regular exercise.

Exercising with a group can be fun and beneficial. Sometimes exercising with other people is such fun that you are more likely to continue your fitness programme.

You should always be able to catch your breath and speak comfortably while exercising. It is also normal to sense effort and maybe even discomfort.

EXERCISE REDUCES:

- ◆ Risk for heart disease ◆
- Risk for stroke
- ◆ Risk of developing diabetes
- ◆ Risk for osteoporosis in females and males ◆
- Depression and anxiety