

Physiotherapy Department

Whiplash management advice sheet

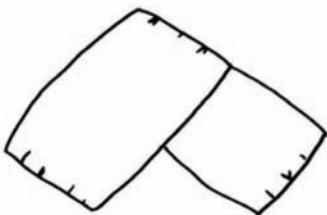
What is Whiplash?

- Whiplash is an injury of the head and neck, is caused by a sudden, exaggerated thrust of the head backwards, forwards, and sometimes sideways, and can also affect the low back.
- Abnormal forces are applied to muscles, ligaments, nerves, bones, discs and blood vessels as the head moves beyond normal ranges. There may be no visible cuts or bruises from this type of injury. The symptoms will differ in each individual and will depend on the severity of the accident.

What should I do?

- Do not panic. Whiplash is one of the most common types of injury.
- Rest. Relatively short, but frequently (maximum one hour) in the pain-free and most supported position. As your symptoms reduce it is important to reduce the rest time and increase your periods of activity
- You may find it necessary to use more pillows than usual or have to adopt new pillow positions, such as:

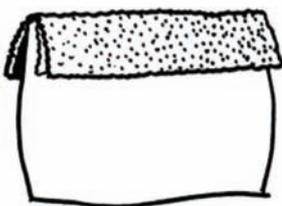
V Pillow



Butterfly Pillow



Pillow and Towel



- Gentle, slow, small movements should be done in a relaxed manner every hour throughout the day and whenever spasm and pain build up, ie 'little and often'.

Repeat the following exercises five times:

1 Look over left shoulder



Look over right shoulder



2 Take left ear to left shoulder



Take right ear to right shoulder



3 Bend neck backwards then bend neck forwards



4 Practice tucking chin back, as if making a 'double chin' hold 5-10 seconds



If exercises are difficult to do in sitting, then do exercises 1,2 and 4 in lying with one pillow supporting the head. Aim to progress exercises towards end of second week and do them in sitting.

- It may be useful to apply an ice pack (frozen peas) to your neck during the initial stages, and this is recommended during the first 48 hours up until two weeks after the injury. Make sure the pack is wrapped in a towel in order to protect your skin. Leave pack on for 20 minutes and repeat every 2-4 hours.
- Do not stop work. Try and obtain lighter duties if needed.

Things to avoid:

- **Do not** move quickly or sharply.
- **Do not** do too many movements. Remember 'little and often'.
- **Do not** reduce activity for the rest of your body.
- **Do not** stop moving the injured part.

Sleep

- May be disturbed. Try to do some gentle exercise.

REMEMBER
Pain is a normal response to injury,
and injuries will heal

Only perform exercises to the start of your pain – never force yourself through severe pain. Stop the exercises if they significantly increase your symptoms.

If your symptoms persist, or significantly worsen, seek medical advice.

Notify your GP if you have any of the following symptoms since your whiplash injury:

- Dizziness**
- Double vision**
- Loss of consciousness**
- Difficulties swallowing**
- Speech problems**
- Loss of balance**
- Difficulties walking**
- Facial/tongue numbness**
- Metallic taste in mouth**
- Numbness, pins & needles in one/both arms**

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