Whiplash Injury

**What is Whiplash?**

Whiplash is the term used to describe injury to the neck, caused by sudden or excessive movement of the neck moving forwards, backwards or to the side.

**How is it caused?**

Whiplash is commonly experienced in road traffic accidents which result in sudden acceleration and deceleration forces on the neck, which may occur in rear-end or side impact motor vehicle collisions. Whiplash can also occur during sudden falls or sporting injuries.

**What are the symptoms?**

Symptoms can include:

* Headaches
* Neck pain and stiffness
* Reduced movement to the neck and upper back
* Tenderness over the neck muscles

Other symptoms include dizziness, blurred vision, pain in the jaw or pain on swallowing, and unusual sensations of the facial skin may occur for a short while, but soon go. Speak to a doctor if any of these persist. Some people feel irritable, tired and have difficulty concentrating for a few days after injury.

Symptoms after often not felt straight away and can often take several hours to occur. The onset of pain is often worse the next day and for a few days after the injury has occurred.

**How is it diagnosed?**

Whiplash is usually diagnosed from your description of the injury and your symptoms and a physical assessment of your neck. If bony injury was suspected then you would be referred for an X ray.

**What can I do?**

Exercise

One of the most important things you can do to relieve your symptoms, is to keep moving your neck. Try completing neck movements every few hours as this will enable you to get back to normal activity as soon as possible. Movement will help to reduce muscle tension, reduce pain and increase range of movement.

These exercises should be carried out often, throughout the day. These exercises may cause discomfort but should not increase your pain or symptoms. Perform the exercises in a slow and controlled manner.



Return to normal activities and work

Research has shown that people who carry on with their normal activities and return to work, have a better recovery than those who stop their activity levels. Although your neck may be painful it is important to gently keep it moving, even at the early stages, as it is highly unlikely that you will cause further damage. If required, you may wish to liase with your employer regarding temporary modification of normal duties whilst you recover.

Medication

If you require medication to relieve your pain, you can liase with your GP or pharmacist to determine the most appropriate medication. It can be difficult to move your neck if you are in too much pain, therefore it is useful to take pain medication, to relieve the pain, enable you to carry out exercise effectively and allow a faster recovery.

Hot and cold

You can reduce your pain by using an ice pack under a damp cloth wherever the pain is for up to 10 minutes. You can alternate this by using heat therapy, such as a hot water bottle wrapped in a towel or a wheat bag, to relax the muscles in your neck.

**Factors influencing pain and recovery**

Whilst you are experiencing acromioclavicular joint pain a number of other factors can influence your pain levels. Keep the following factors in mind to help move the healing process along:

Look after yourself

Pain is not usually simply a physical problem. Your general well-being can make you vulnerable to pain and your wellbeing can also be made worse by pain. Looking after your general health and well-being will help recovery. There is helpful advice on this website: [https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou](https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/)

Reduce stress and anxiety

It is normal for people with pain to have stress, anxiety and change in mood. This may affect your ability to cope with the pain and may influence your pain levels. Help is available if you are being affected by stress, anxiety or low mood – see the links below or discuss with your practitioner.

It is important that your whole nervous system is in a healthy state to aid recovery. If your brain is stressed or overworked this may slow recovery. Relaxation is an important part of your recovery. Simple relaxation techniques may help manage pain and stress. Try to set aside some time each day to relax – you can use relaxation techniques as linked below, or simply an activity you enjoy – reading, deep breathing, sitting in the garden, singing – whatever relaxes you.

Find help and support here: <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>

<https://www.northessexiapt.nhs.uk/west-essex>

Physical Activity

Exercise improves fitness, confidence with movement and strength. It can also help reduce your stress and tension and improve your mood and quality of sleep, helping support you to return to normal activities. Perhaps you could simply start by trying to walk for 10 minutes per day.

Alcohol

Avoid alcohol in the early stages of healing (first three days). Evidence has shown this can slow down recovery and increase the chances of re-injury. <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/>

Sleep

Sleep is very important for your wellbeing. Poor sleep quality, and lack of sleep can make managing pain more difficult. Consistently getting 6-9 hours is recommended. Get help and tips here:

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/>

Smoking

Smoking can also impact how quickly tissues can heal and affect pain levels. For help with stopping smoking <https://www.essexlifestyleservice.org.uk/stop-smoking/> <https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/>

**How long will it last?**

Whiplash usually gets better on its own or alongside treatments. Whiplash is not a long term condition and the prognosis is very good. The length of time and nature of symptoms experienced varies from each individual. Length of time can range from a few days, weeks or months, depending on the severity of symptoms.

**Is there anything I should avoid?**

Do not wear a neck brace or collar as this will slow down your recovery.

**What other options are there?**

Physiotherapy

Patients may find that symptoms reduce following completion of regular exercises, however if symptoms persist you may choose to self-refer to see a Physiotherapist.

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If you wish to receive 1:1 physiotherapy treatment please fill out a self-referral form which can found at <https://eput.nhs.uk/our-services/essex/west-essex-community-health-services/adults/rehabilitation/musculo-skeletal-physiotherapy> and send to epunft.mskphysio@nhs.net

A Physiotherapist will assess your neck and prescribe a course of treatment which may include an exercise programme, manual mobilisation of the neck joints or soft tissue therapy.