

Whiplash Neck Pain

Service User Information Leaflet

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Produced by Fife Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Service

Diagrams: © PhysioTools

What is whiplash?

A whiplash neck injury occurs when your head is suddenly jolted backwards and forwards in a whip like movement. This can cause some of the muscles and ligaments in your neck to stretch.

What are the symptoms?

These may include:

- General pain in your neck area which may radiate to your shoulder or between your shoulder blades, out into your arm or up to your head causing a headache.
- Tension in the muscles of your neck.
- Difficulty moving your neck normally.
- Weakness or altered sensation in one or both of your arms.

How is it treated?

What you do in the early stages of your injury can affect your recovery. Most injuries are not serious and the pain will improve over time. It is important to keep your neck moving whilst it is recovering. This will help prevent stiffness. It will help you to get better faster. Long inactivity is not helpful. This can slow down recovery.

The first few days:

- Take pain medication for pain relief. Your doctor may have given them for you. Alternatively your local pharmacy will be able to suggest something;
- Try to stay active. This may mean you have to change your activities slightly;
- Some people find heat or ice packs helpful. Wrap the heat or ice in a damp towel. Leave it on for up to 10 minutes. Periodically check your skin to avoid heat or ice burns.
- Try to sit in an upright position. You may be more comfortable if you support your lower back. This can be done with a rolled towel and sit in a straight backed chair.
- You may find it difficult to get comfortable in bed. Use pillows to help support your neck. Sleeping on your back or side provides a better position for your neck.
- Research shows that using a neck collar delays recovery.

Tense muscles, caused by anxiety and stress can increase the amount of discomfort you feel. You may find exercise, controlled breathing and relaxation helpful.

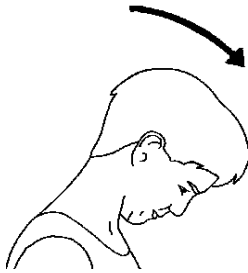
Please see your GP if you do not manage to get back to most normal activities within 6 weeks or experience pins and needles, altered sensation in your mouth/face, difficulty swallowing or nausea . Please see your GP if your neck is not recovering at the rate that you expect.

Early exercises

Repeat each movement up to 10 times every 1-2 hours or as your pain allows. Avoid rolling your head round.

As your neck movement improves your pain will start to ease.

If the pain seems to be getting worse reduce the number of exercises you do and do smaller movements until the pain improves.

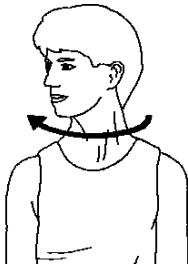


In sitting. Bend your head forward until you feel a stretch behind your neck. Hold for approximately 5 to 10 seconds.



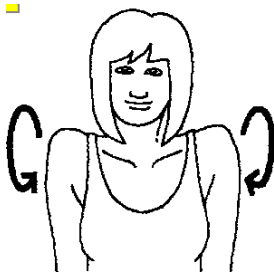
In sitting tilt your head toward one shoulder until you feel the stretch on the opposite side.

Hold for approximately 5 to 10 seconds. Repeat to the other side.



In sitting turn your head to one side until you feel a stretch.

Hold for approximately 5 to 10 seconds. Repeat to the other side.



In sitting or standing. Roll your shoulders in both directions.

Repeat 5 to 10 times in each direction.

For Further Advice:

www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/muscle-bone-and-joints