

Whiplash: How Chiropractic May Help (AND YOUR OTHER TREATMENT OPTIONS)

Symptoms of whiplash may not develop until days after the injury.

Overview: Whiplash is a general term that applies to injuries in the soft tissues of the neck due to a sudden force, often unexpected, that moves the head beyond the neck's normal range of motion. The soft tissues of the neck that can be injured as the head "whips" forward and then back are the discs, ligaments, tendons, and muscles.

Common causes of whiplash include traffic accidents (usually rear-end collisions), sports activities, and accidental falls. Though the injury is generally referred to as "whiplash," your chiropractor and other health care providers may refer to more specific injuries, such as strain, sprain, or other terms depending on the clinical findings.

Symptoms of whiplash may not develop until days after the injury. If you suffer trauma and suspect whiplash, the sooner you seek treatment, the better (see "Research Review").

Symptoms:

- Neck pain
- Swelling
- Neck tenderness
- Muscle spasm in the neck, back, and/or shoulder
- Numbness or tingling
- Limited range of motion of the neck
- Headache
- Pain in shoulder or arm
- Dizziness
- Memory loss
- Poor concentration
- Sleep disturbances
- Emotional problems like depression, anxiety, or irritability



Conditions with Similar Symptoms:

- Cervical spine problems
- Infection or tumor
- Arthritis

YOUR TREATMENT

Because there are a variety of conditions that can cause symptoms that mimic whiplash and because there are a number of possible reasons you may be experiencing pain, a variety of treatment options may be considered. The decision on which treatment should be used will be based on your examination findings, possible diagnostic imaging if clinically necessary, the doctor's experience treating patients with similar conditions, your personal preferences, and the best available scientific evidence.

- **MULTIMODAL CARE** may include cervical mobilization and/or manipulation/adjustment of the neck. Mobilization involves putting the joints and soft tissues of the neck through normal range of motion in controlled stretches. Adjustments for whiplash may be performed on joints of the cervical spine, back, or upper extremities, depending on the clinical findings for your case. These methods of care are not just treatments of the symptoms, but a direct focus on the cause. Without correcting the spinal dysfunction of your whiplash, the symptoms are likely to continue.
- **EDUCATION** is intended to teach you self-help techniques and coping skills. Changing your beliefs about the condition can make managing symptoms easier. With the necessary skills, you can learn to recognize your limitations and work within them.
- **STRENGTH TRAINING** may help those with whiplash by several means. First, strengthening the soft tissues of the neck may make one less prone to injury and fatigue. Second, exercise increases production of endorphins, the body's natural pain reliever. Third, exercise

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To get the most benefit from conservative chiropractic care, it may be wise to begin treatment as soon as possible after injury. In an effort to determine which patients with neck pain are most likely to benefit from chiropractic, researchers in Denmark questioned neck pain patients aged between 18 and 65 years who had not had chiropractic treatment within three months. Patients were questioned about the duration of their pain, disability, and recovery on the first three visits and then at three months and one year. Factors that were found to play a possible role in predicting a favorable outcome from chiropractic treatment included intermittent neck pain, the patient not being on sick leave or getting workers' compensation when initially seeking treatment, a higher level of education, less tiredness, a belief that treatment would be helpful, no pain in the morning, and a perception of poor general health. The strongest predictor of a positive outcome was seen in those who sought chiropractic treatment the soonest. (Rubinstein SM, et al. *Spine*. June 1, 2008; Vol. 33, No. 13, pp. 1451-1458.)

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P. O. Box 400
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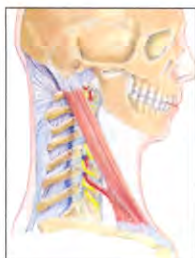
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increases and improves blood flow, which may provide relief of pain. The exercises you are to do will be determined based on your physical condition and needs.

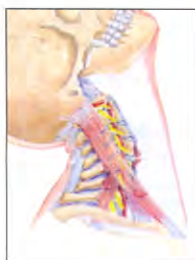
Illustrated HealthWays

INJURY TO THE CERVICAL SPINE



AT IMPACT

Lower body moves forward suddenly, head remains momentarily in place. Note loss of cervical curve.



HYPEREXTENSION

Head arcs backward upon the neck, protective flexor muscles contract.



HYPERFLEXION

Head rebounds forward, neck structures compress.

HYPEREXTENSION (REAR-END COLLISION)

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A Natural Method of Health Care: Introduction to Chiropractic, Tenth Edition. PracticeMakers Products, Inc. Palmerton, PA. 2000.

- **ELECTROTHERAPY** (which may include transcutaneous nerve stimulation, ultrasound and electric muscle stimulation) is thought to decrease inflammation and therefore may relieve symptoms of whiplash. These forms of therapy may also help to relax muscles and soft tissues of the neck.
- **ACUPUNCTURE** involves the insertion of very fine needles into the skin at points determined based on the condition being treated. Acupuncture has been used for centuries and the theory behind it is that the needles can correct and improve the body's flow of energy (called Chi). In addition to the needles, forms of acupuncture can incorporate pressure, electric currents, laser, or heat.
- **TRACTION** may relieve pressure on the cervical discs by gently extending the neck. Traction is used for pain relief and to improve motion. Traction may be applied in the chiropractic office or at home. If it is recommended for home, information on appropriate methods will be provided to you.
- **THERMOTHERAPY** may include ultrasound, shortwave diathermy, and moist heat. If used in your care, these will either be applied in the office or discussed for you to apply at home.
- **LASER** may help some manage whiplash symptoms. Laser is applied to the necessary areas determined by examination. Laser is intended to activate endorphins, which naturally reduce pain. The treatment is painless and may require multiple treatments.
- **CRYOTHERAPY** is the application of ice to the injured area. If this is recommended for your case, information on how often and how long to apply ice will be discussed. Never apply ice directly to the skin.

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- **MASSAGE** may be beneficial to relax the body and relieve stress.
- **CERVICAL COLLAR** may be suggested to stabilize the neck, keep your spine aligned, relieve pain, and provide support for injured muscles. If your case requires a cervical collar, information on a correct fit and correct use will be provided.

YOUR ALTERNATIVES

Your condition may be best treated using both chiropractic treatments and other treatment from additional healthcare professionals. If your condition requires it, a direct referral for treatment may be made by your chiropractor to medical, surgical or other healthcare providers.

- **IV METHYLPREDNISOLONE**, a strong anti-inflammatory steroid, may be used in the medical treatment of whiplash. If this treatment is considered, please get information on potential side effects and provide the prescribing doctor with information on conditions you may have (such as diabetes), which might affect the decision to continue with treatment.
- **ORAL PHARMACEUTICALS** that are sometimes prescribed for whiplash are muscle relaxants and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). NSAIDs, both prescribed and over-the-counter (OTC), include ibuprofen, naproxen sodium, and aspirin. A pharmacist or the prescribing doctor can provide information on these medications, including potential side effects.

PREVENTION

- Make sure you have a properly positioned headrest in your car (and as a passenger in other cars)
- Use seat belts
- Drive defensively to reduce the risk of being taken by surprise
- If you are aware that a collision is about to happen, brace yourself for impact
- Wear proper equipment in sports activities
- Maintain good health and weight



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News & Views

Smoking: Bad for Body AND Mind

As if you need another reason to quit smoking, a new study suggests that smoking affects the mind as well as the body. French researchers looked at data from 5,000 British civil servants and found that those who smoked were the lowest-performing in tests of memory, reasoning, vocabulary, and verbal fluency. The people studied were aged 35 to 55 years at the beginning of the study and they were tested again 17 years later. Not only did the smokers perform worse on the tests, they were also less willing to take the test again and they were more likely to have passed away in the 17 years between tests. The full study was published in the journal *Archives of Internal Medicine*. (Reuters. June 9, 2008.)

Can You Hear Me Now?

Australian researchers have shown that young people can cause permanent damage to their ears by listening to loud music in a bar or through headphones. They found that 70% of Australians aged 18 to 34 years had suffered some degree of permanent damage, having reported ringing in their ears. They also found that 60% of young people who listen to music through headphones have the volume loud enough to damage their ears. Harvey Dillon, from the Australian government-funded Hearing Australia, said "If it is loud, it can cause damage and if it does cause you damage, it is permanent. Our rule of thumb is if people have to raise their voices or actually shout at you to make themselves understood while you are listening to music in your ears, then that is loud enough to be potentially damaging." The information was published in a report from the Australian Government, titled "Is Australia Listening?" (Reuters. June 10, 2008.)

High Cholesterol May Affect More Than the Heart

There's another reason to lower cholesterol: it is now linked to an increased risk of Parkinson's disease. Scientists in Finland looked at the relationship between cholesterol levels and Parkinson's disease in a study of 24,773 men and 26,153 women between the ages of 25 and 74 years. Of the initial group, 321 men and 304 women developed Parkinson's during the average 18 years of follow-up. Those with the highest levels of cholesterol had an 86% higher likelihood of developing the disease. The study was published in the journal *Neurology*. (Reuters. June 6, 2008.)

Q: How do I know whether to use ice or heat for an injury?

A Altering the temperature of an injury can be quite beneficial to the healing process. Unfortunately for many people, knowing whether to use ice or heat can be very confusing. Knowing the effects that each has on the body will help you determine which would benefit your particular condition.

- The application of heat increases the circulation of blood and decreases tension in muscles and ligaments. Heat applications are advantageous for the relief of chronic muscle or ligament tension.
- The application of ice, in contrast, decreases the flow of blood, decreases swelling from acute or recent injury, decreases pain nerve impulse transmission, and increases muscle and ligament tension. Application of ice is advantageous during periods of acute injury in which strain and sprain have occurred. (Ice should never be placed directly on skin but should be wrapped in cloth.)

It is generally best to apply heat to areas of chronic tension in the absence of recent swelling. It becomes confusing

when muscle and ligament tension occur in the same area as joint swelling. In these instances, it is best to apply heat to the area of muscle tension and ice to the area of swelling. Heat is generally more beneficial than ice for muscle spasm. When unusual or strenuous physical activity is followed by back, neck, shoulder, or other joint pain, ice is preferred.

Moist heat penetrates to deeper layers of the skin than dry heat. Be sure to wipe moisture from your skin after removing the heat to prevent rapid cooling of the skin. Covering the area after heat application will hold the heat in the area longer. After removing an ice pack, cover the area to keep the skin from being exposed to drafts.

If you are ever unsure about whether to use ice or heat, simply contact your Doctor of Chiropractic. Not only will he or she be able to advise you about optimal ice or heat use, he or she will also be able to determine whether you would benefit from additional treatments.

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Wilmington Clinic
Dr. M.J. Fiscella
4918 Weber Road
St. Louis, MO 63123
(314) 353-1477

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Wilmington Clinic
Dr. M.J. Fiscella
4918 Weber Road
St. Louis, MO 63123

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