

Whiplash

Patient Information

MSK Therapy Services



The Patient Information Leaflets page on the Trust website is available on the link:
<https://www.wwl.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets> or scan the QR code.

Author ID: KT
Leaflet Ref: Tpy 009
Version: 2
Leaflet title: Whiplash
Last review: November 2025
Expiry Date: November 2027

Our Values**People at
the Heart****Listen and
Involve****Kind and
Respectful****One
Team**

Introduction

Whiplash injury results from a sprain of the neck following a sudden movement of the head, usually after sudden forwards-backwards movements, commonly in a road traffic accident; but it can happen during a significant fall or during some sports/activities, such as trampolining or watersports.

The most likely cause of pain is a strain of the small joints of the neck and ligaments/soft tissues. Whiplash will improve over weeks, but it is not uncommon for the recovery to take months - for some people it may limit their working life and activities.

It can take several hours, even days, for the symptoms to start after you injure your neck.

Keeping your neck mobile and continuing with your daily activities is highly recommended after whiplash.

Common symptoms:

- Pain and stiffness in the head, neck and upper back
- Dizziness, headaches, muscle spasms/soreness
- Feeling more 'jumpy', stressed and 'irritable'

Keeping your neck mobile and continuing with your daily activities is recommended. Neck collars or braces are not recommended. Getting adequate pain relief with simple pain killers is very important in the early stages, as this will allow you to move around more freely.

If you are not seeing any recovery four to six weeks after your injury, then it is important to consider if how you feel about the trauma is preventing your recovery.

Some people experience a strong stress reaction to the trauma with symptoms such as nightmares, intrusive thoughts about the trauma and finding themselves more irritable and quick to temper than is usual for them. If this is the case; talk to your GP or physiotherapist about psychological support that may help.

Aims

The length of time it takes you to get better will depend on the extent of your injury. Every injury is different. Most people will be able to continue with their normal activities, but it may take weeks or even months for the discomfort to go away completely. If you have had to reduce your normal activities, you should aim to return to them as soon as possible. It may seem that it is taking a long time for you to recover. The most important thing is that you keep moving and do the exercises your Physiotherapist will give you, as evidence has shown this to be the most effective method in treating this type of injury.

Risks

Seek urgent medical advice if you experience any of the following:

- severe pain despite taking regular pain relief
- tingling or pins and needles on one or both sides of your body
- problems with walking or sitting upright
- sudden "electric shock" feeling in your neck and back which may also go into your arms and legs
- weakness of your arms or legs
- problems with speech or swallowing

These symptoms could be caused by damage to the nerves in your neck or back. For most people this pain is mild, does not interfere with normal activities and gradually gets better. Some people have more severe neck pain.

Benefits

If you follow the advice of your Physiotherapist and do your exercises regularly, even if they cause you some discomfort, you will notice an improvement in your symptoms faster than if you don't. Exercise is the best way to manage an injury of this kind, and you will be able to return to your normal activities much faster.

References

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/whiplash/>

<https://www.webmd.com/pain-management/guide/pain-management-whiplash>

<https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/neck-pain-whiplash-injury/>

Comments, Compliments or Complaints

The Patient Relations/Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) Department provides confidential on the spot advice, information and support to patients, relatives, friends, and carers.

Contact Us

Tel: 01942 822376 (Monday to Friday 9am until 4pm)

The Patient Relations/PALS Manager
Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Royal Albert Edward Infirmary
Wigan Lane
Wigan
WN1 2NN

Ask 3 Questions

Become more involved in decisions about your healthcare. You may be asked to make choices about your treatment. To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions:

1. What are my options?
2. What are the positives and negatives of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?



How We Use Your Information

For details on how we collect, use, and store the information we hold about you, please see patient information leaflet, Ref. **Corp 006** How we use your information, this can be found on the Patient Information Leaflets page on the Trust website, see details on the front cover.

This leaflet is also available in audio, large print, Braille, and other languages upon request. For more information, please ask in the department/ward.

© Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.
All rights reserved. Not to be reproduced in whole or in part without the permission of the copyright owner.

Call 111 first when it's less urgent than 999.



EMPLOYER RECOGNITION SCHEME

GOLD AWARD 2021

Proudly serving those who serve.

Phone: 0808 802 1212

Text: 81212

www.veteransgateway.org.uk

