Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Whiplash

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Whiplash

Patient Information

MSK Therapy Services

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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/



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