



## **Whiplash (Whiplash Associated Disorder, WAD)**

### **What is it?**

Whiplash is when a sudden movement or jolt to the body or head results in pain stiffness and loss of movement in the neck.

### **Symptoms**

Whiplash symptoms often don't appear when the injury is caused. It may take 6-12 hours to a few days for symptoms to show and they may continue to get worse in the days after the injury. Symptoms may include:

- neck pain and stiffness/loss of movement,
- tenderness along the back of the neck,
- pain in the shoulders or arms,
- headaches.
- pain in the lower back, and
- pain, numbness, or paraesthesia (pins and needles/numbness) in the arms or hands.

Usually, symptoms begin to improve after a few days and in around 60% of cases, symptoms completely disappear after four weeks. Sometimes it takes a few months for symptoms to completely go away and some people will still have some stiffness and pain some time after the injury occurred.

### **What causes it?**

Whiplash happens when a sudden jerk or jolt to your body or head makes your head move violently away from the body. This makes your neck move beyond its normal range of movement so the ligaments, tendons and muscles in your neck, stretch and strain. Whiplash is common after motor vehicle accidents, when a collision jolts the head. However, the condition can also result from a blow to the head or through long-term repetitive damage to the neck (such as cradling a telephone between your shoulder and head on a regular basis).

### **What can you do?**

Apply an ice pack soon after the injury occurs to help reduce swelling avoid application to the front of your neck. Do not apply ice directly onto your skin. Use a towel to wrap the ice to provide a protective barrier. Apply the ice for around 10 minutes at a time and repeat 2 hourly.

Taking a painkiller such as paracetamol or an anti-inflammatory painkiller such as ibuprofen, will reduce pain and swelling. Always follow the instructions and ask your GP or pharmacist for advice if you have any other conditions or if you are taking any other medication.

In the first few days to a week you may need to rest your neck, but as the pain eases, try to exercise your neck as much as possible, there are some examples of simple exercises on the following page. You should avoid absolute rest. Gradually try to increase the range of neck movements and continue with normal activities and work where you can.

You will also find it helpful to support your head with a good pillow when you sleep, and to have good posture - walk with your back and neck straight and sit upright

*Treatment may vary and you should seek professional advice:*

- if the pain becomes worse.
- if your function remains limited
- if significant pain persists beyond 4-6 weeks.
- if any numbness, weakness, or pins and needles develop in an arm or hand.



## Exercises:

- The following exercises have been provided as they may help your symptoms if done regularly and it is important that you also gradually resume your normal activities to get the neck back to normal strength.
- They are not appropriate for everyone and remember to commence these exercises at a manageable level.
- The recommended time, repetitions and frequency of each exercise are intended as a guide that you may need to modify.
- It is normal to experience some muscle fatigue and generalised muscle soreness when doing a new exercise but you should not experience severe pain or acute exacerbation of your symptoms whilst doing them and particularly not for a prolonged period of time after the exercises.
- If you are not managing consult your GP.

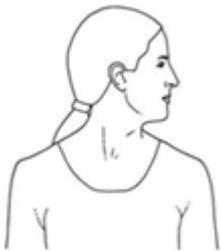
**NB: If you experience dizziness, light-headedness or pins and needles stop doing these exercises.**



If you can sit in front of a mirror the first few times you do this exercise.

Tilt your head to the side so that your ear moves closer to your shoulder (don't lift your shoulder!). You should feel a stretch on the other side of your neck. Repeat by tilting your head to the other shoulder. Hold 5 seconds.

Repeat 5 times each side, 2 - 3 times per day.



While sitting down, move your chin towards your shoulder rotating your head as far as you can slowly. Repeat to towards the other shoulder.

Repeat 5 times on each side, 2 - 3 times per day.



Tuck your chin in towards your chest.  
Look down as far as you can towards the floor.  
Feel the stretch in the back of your neck.  
Now look up slowly towards the ceiling as far as you can tolerate.

Repeat 5 times, 2 - 3 times per day.