

WHIPLASH

What is it?

Whiplash is an acceleration/deceleration injury usually caused in a motor vehicle accident or in contact sports. The condition refers to injury to any number of structures in the neck.

The mechanism of injury is from a violent thrust forward or backward and significant stretching and compression of the neck tissues results in injury. Many tissues may be damaged including bone (fractures or joint compression), ligaments and muscles (over stretched or torn) and nerves stretched.

How does it feel?

Surprisingly there is very little pain at the time of injury but typically pain and stiffness develop over the 2-3 days after the incident. The pain will usually centre in the neck and occasionally in the head and shoulders. The pain is usually made worst by neck movements and may present as a dull ache and/or shooting pain into the head and shoulders from the neck.

What should you do?

If you suspect you have suffered a whiplash injury you should visit your doctor and physiotherapist. They will be able to help diagnose and best manage the problem.

It is highly recommended that you seek professional help after sustaining a whiplash injury because good management may reduce the likelihood of long-term damage in the joints, discs, ligaments and muscles of your neck.

Treatment

Your doctor can help you with medications that will manage the pain in the first days to weeks after the injury. In more severe cases images via X-ray or MRI may be requested to eliminate fracture or disc injury.

Once an accurate diagnosis has been made others measures to help relieve pain can be implemented by your physiotherapist such as wearing a soft collar, use of heat, gentle exercise and activity modifications.

When your injury is stabilised your physiotherapist will be able to advise you on the best exercises to regain normal movement. A variety of stretching and strengthening exercises will usually be prescribed.

It is very important that in time you can move your neck through a good range of movement and have adequate endurance in your neck muscles to participate in your usual sporting, working and recreational activities.