

Whiplash

Information for Patients



This leaflet has been written to give you the right information about whiplash and what you can do to help with your recovery.

What is whiplash?

The term whiplash-associated disorder is used to describe injuries caused by a sudden acceleration-deceleration (speeding up and slowing down) movement and is most commonly associated with the neck following road traffic incidents.

What are the common symptoms?

Pain: Whiplash can cause pain but sometimes it doesn't cause any pain at all. In most cases when the neck is sore, the discomfort will stay around the neck, but sometimes may travel to the shoulder blade and even to the arm.

Stiffness: Your neck may feel stiff or tight. This is likely to be linked to increased muscular work around the neck as it deals with the recovery of your issue.

Head feeling 'too heavy': Feeling that your head is heavy may be common but is not a concerning symptom and is likely to be linked to muscular tiredness, as a painful neck will make the muscles around the neck region work differently.

Pins and needles: Although not a common feature of whiplash, you may sometimes feel pins and needles into the arm, hand or fingers. Reassuringly, the symptoms of tingling with a whiplash often get better with time.

Worry: For most, whiplash often follows a car accident which is a traumatic experience, both physically and emotionally. Pain may lead to worry or concern with movement or activity, but this will likely improve with time.

What can I do to help myself?

Calm it down: Often the best place to start with any painful complaint is to try and calm it down. In a lot of cases there will be things your neck likes to do and some things that it is less happy to do after your symptoms started. Calming it down simply means looking at the things it doesn't like and trying to make some adjustments or changes to make it easier for yourself. For example, your neck might get more tired or painful than it used to if you're working on a computer or watching TV. It might be that taking more breaks, introducing some gentle movement or just using some head support makes life a little easier whilst your neck is recovering.

Pain control: Applying something warm around your neck may also be useful in helping with some of the pain (do remember to wrap your hot water bottle in a towel before applying it to your skin to avoid burns).

Get your neck moving: Movement is medicine for your neck. Any movement is good movement, even if it is sore, however if something is really painful then working around that movement is sensible.

Your neck is strong and that won't have changed since your symptoms started. Although it is sore, it remains robust and moving your neck as early as you can, will help improve your chances of a better overall outcome.

Will it get better?

For most people, whiplash will not be a pleasant experience but reassuringly, it does have the potential to get better. By understanding the issue as best you can and by adjusting what is sore to then allow you to explore some exercise/s, is often the best formula for success.

If you would like to know more about whiplash or find a greater choice of exercises, you can explore our dedicated webpage.

Search online: [Norfolk and Waveney MSK services](#) 'whiplash'

Exercises



Slowly and gradually, look down to the floor. To increase the stretch, place your hands on the back of your head and gently pull down.

Complete little and often throughout the day.



Slowly and gradually, turn your head to look over your shoulder.

Complete little and often throughout the day.



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