

Whiplash

Information and advice

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This information is designed to supplement the advice given by your doctor, and is written by physiotherapists based on the latest medical advice.

Following a road traffic accident, it is common to experience pain and stiffness of the neck and shoulders. This is because of inflammation in the tissues around the neck, which have been strained during the accident.

If you feel you need a collar, try to restrict its use to the first couple of days only. Take it off regularly to do the gentle exercises on the next page.

Taking painkillers regularly is very important at this early stage. If your usual painkillers are not enough, your doctor can advise you.

Other ideas to help reduce the pain:

- An ice pack, such as frozen peas, wrapped in a damp towel and placed on the back of the neck for a maximum of 20 minutes. You can repeat this several times a day. If using within 72 hours post injury only apply ice for a maximum of 10 minutes. Do not use if your skin sensation is impaired.
- Avoid using heat for the first 72 hours but after this you may find heat very useful. You could use a wheat pack or a hot water bottle (make sure it has a cover). Do not use if you have any impairment of your skin sensation.
- Start gentle exercises as soon as possible. This has been shown to help relieve pain and help the tissues to heal better. You may find it more comfortable to start your exercises lying down with your head supported on one or two pillows.
- Regular but short periods of rest can be very useful. You may need more pillows than usual. It may be helpful to spend 10 minutes or so relaxing in this position once you have done your exercises.

Please turn over to find a range of exercises to help whiplash injuries.

Exercise

The following exercises should be done three or four times a day. Move into a gentle stretch only, do not push into pain.

Sitting on a hard-backed chair:

1. Turn your head slowly to look over your left shoulder, and then turn to look over your right shoulder.



Repeat five times

2. Tilt your head slowly towards your shoulder.

Return to the middle and repeat to the other side.

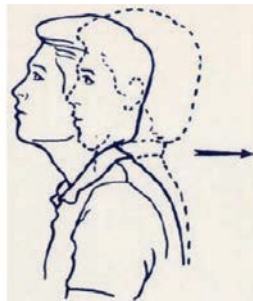
Repeat five times



3. Sitting with your back supported, gently tuck your chin into your chest as if making a 'double chin'.

Hold for the count of three seconds

Repeat five times



4. Shrug your shoulders up, back and around, then relax.

Repeat five times

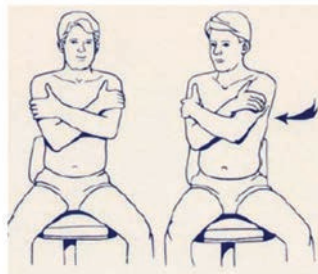


5. Sitting in a chair with your arms across your chest, turn your trunk to the right and hold for five seconds.

Then turn to the left.

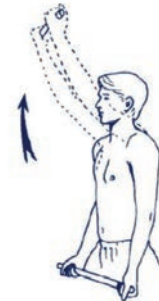
Repeat five times

each side



6. Stretch both hands overhead as high as possible.

Repeat five times



During the first three weeks the acute pain should start to settle. Some pain and stiffness may persist for up to eight weeks. You should continue the exercises until full pain free movement is regained.

If you feel the exercises are making your pain worse, reduce the number or frequency of the exercises or stop and seek advice.



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