

Whiplash Associated Disorder

Neck pain after an accident

What is Whiplash?

“Whiplash” is a term used to describe neck pain following an injury to the soft tissues of your neck (such as ligaments, tendons and muscles). It is usually caused by a sudden motion or force that causes the neck to move back and forth beyond its normal range of motion. The most common cause of whiplash is a car accident. It can also be caused by sporting accidents or accidental falls.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of whiplash can occur the same day as the accident, the next morning, and sometimes after a few days. Symptoms vary from person to person and may include:

- Headaches.
- Neck pain and stiffness.
- Pain in your upper back, shoulders and arms.
- Difficulty turning your head.
- Weakness, numbness or tingling in your arms.
- Drowsiness and/or dizziness.
- Soreness across the chest (from the seatbelt or airbag).

If you have symptoms of whiplash after an accident, contact your doctor first.

Will I get better?

Most people with whiplash recover quite quickly. Most people find that their neck pain or headache clears within a few days to a few weeks. Some people might have symptoms for a few months. Remember that it is normal to experience discomfort during the recovery process. It is also normal to have good and bad days.

What can I do?

- Aim to get back to your normal routine as soon as possible.
- Modify the way you do some tasks for a short while, but it is important to stay active.
- Take short walks several times a day to help ease your pain and/or stiffness, and promote healing.
- Place a cold or heat pack on your neck for 10-15 minutes to help with the pain and swelling. Make sure there is a thin cloth layer between the skin and the cold or heat pack. You may have to repeat this several times per day when it is flared up.
- Take your medication as prescribed by your doctor.
- Do specific exercises to help restore movement and flexibility in your neck and shoulders.
- Avoid holding your neck still or keeping it in one position. Even a “good position” will cause muscle fatigue if maintained for too long. Set a timer to remind you to take a break.

Recommended Exercises:

An exercise program that includes walking, posture and neck exercises can assist your recovery.

Remember everyone is different and that you need to feel comfortable with the amount of exercise you are doing.

Walking:

Make a goal of walking a total of 30 minutes per day. Start with short walks (5-10 minutes) several times a day. Use good posture and gently swing your arms during your walk.

The following exercises will help restore your normal motion and strengthen your muscles. Do the exercises in a slow and controlled manner; try not to increase your symptoms.

Posture Exercise: Correct postural position

- Start by sitting or standing tall, legs uncrossed and feet flat on the floor.
- Make sure the back of your neck is taller than the front.
- Gently draw your shoulder blades back and down. Gently nod your chin down as if you are saying 'yes'.
- Hold the position for 10 seconds.
- Repeat regularly, at least every 30 minutes during the day, or more often if you work sitting at a desk.
- The correct postural position will help ease muscle tension in your neck and shoulders.

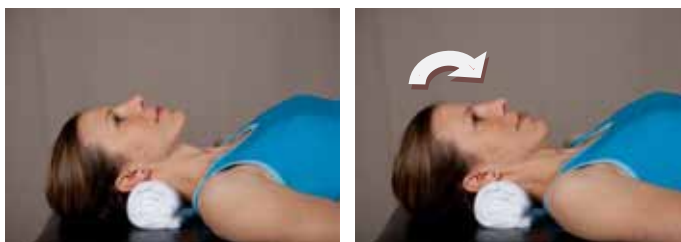


Neck Turning:



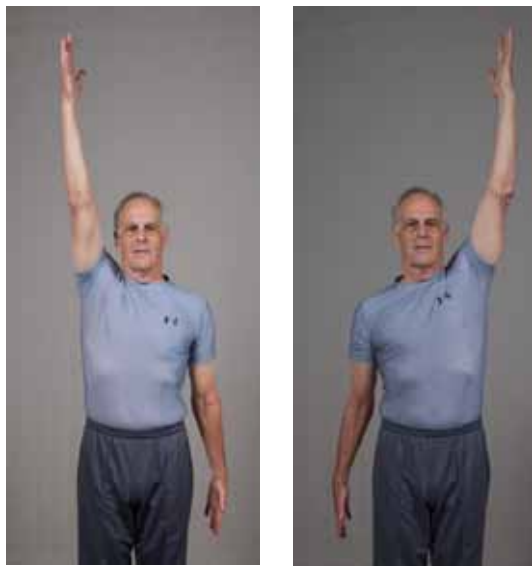
Sit in the correct postural position. Gently turn your head from one side to the other. Try to move as far as you can without making your symptoms worse. Repeat 10 times to each side. Do this exercise lying on your back if sitting is uncomfortable.

Head Nod/Holding:



Lie on your back in a comfortable position for your head and neck with your knees bent. Place a small towel roll under the back of your neck for support. Look at a spot on the wall just above your knees. Follow with a slow and gentle nod of your head as if you were saying 'yes' without increasing your symptoms. Hold the position for 10 seconds and then relax. Repeat the exercise 10 times. You can progress this exercise by doing it in a sitting position.

Alternating Over Head Reach:



Start with your arms relaxed at your side. Raise one hand up over your head and slightly back. Reach the other hand down towards the floor and slightly back. Hold for 3-5 seconds and then switch arms. Repeat 3-10 repetitions with each arm.

Consult with your physical therapist or doctor if you experience an increase in your symptoms with recommended exercises, or if you develop new symptoms of numbness, tingling, or a spread of the pain. This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.