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Whiplash Home Care

Presented by:

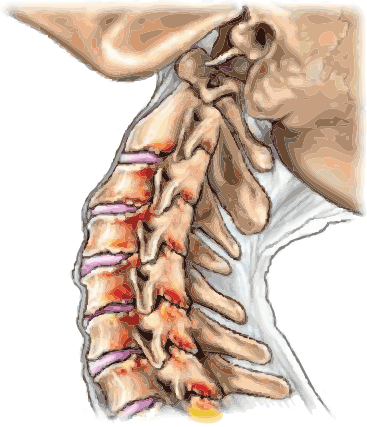
Whiplash injuries usually involve damage to the soft tissues - muscles, ligaments, fascia - of your neck, and they are most commonly caused by rear-end automobile collisions. Whiplash may also be caused by sports trauma or other physical activities. The "whipping" motion of your neck (i.e., the rapid thrusting of your neck backwards then forwards) stretches your neck muscles, ligaments, and other structures, resulting in microtears in your tissues that may cause pain and swelling. Patients who experience long-term and unrelenting whiplash symptoms, reports a study in the journal *Pain*, tend to be older, experience more pain immediately following injury, and develop injury-related cognitive impairment.[1]

Managing the pain and swelling in your injured tissues is the principle goal of chiropractic care in the first few days post-injury, which means that your chiropractor will target your treatments to reduce your inflammation and decrease the intensity of your muscle spasms. How you approach your care and your usual activities of daily living within the first 2 weeks following your whiplash injury can affect your recovery, too. A study published in the journal *Spine* notes that patients who continue to participate in their usual pre-injury activities for the first 14 days after a whiplash injury tend to fare better (i.e., recover more quickly) than patients who take sick leave from work or undergo immobilization during this time.[2]

Remaining engaged in your pre-injury activities (if possible) and adhering to your treatment plan are two important factors in your recovery. So too are home care activities - activities that you can perform or strategies you can adopt to help reduce your pain and speed your healing.

Home Care

Performing the exercises you learned in your chiropractor's office is one of the most important home care strategies you can adopt following a whiplash injury.



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QUESTION:
Which is the most common symptom after a whiplash injury?

A) headache
B) dizziness
C) visual disturbances
D) all of the above

ANSWER:
D) all of the above

TRUE OR FALSE:
Patients who continue their usual pre-injury activities after whiplash injury tend to recover more quickly.

ANSWER:
True

QUESTION:
Which home remedy can help reduce pain and swelling?

A) Bed rest
B) Ice pack
C) Heating Pad

ANSWER:
B) & C) – at proper intervals

To help decrease your pain and inflammation, you can apply ice to your injured area. Apply a package of frozen peas or corn, or an ice pack, wrapped in a towel to your neck (both front and back) for **no more than 15 to 20 minutes per hour every 2 to 3 hours**. Do not let the cold source directly contact your skin, as this could cause ice pack burn, or frostbite. Using a heating pad on a low or medium setting for **15 to 20 minutes per hour every 2 to 3 hours** may also be helpful in reducing your discomfort.

If you were given a soft foam collar by your chiropractor, wear it while performing your daily activities for the amount of time recommended by your doctor. This advice applies for TENS units as well. TENS units are commonly prescribed to whiplash patients and they help reduce both acute and chronic pain. Continue performing your activities of daily living to what degree possible between visits with your chiropractor, but consider avoiding activities that require you to lift objects or tilt your head backward for more than a few seconds at a time. Also avoid strenuous arm, shoulder, upper back, and neck activities, as such activities may worsen your injuries.

Pillow and Sleeping Positions

The proper pillow can significantly reduce the pain you feel upon waking. For many suffering from neck pain, water-based pillows promote a higher-quality and less painful sleep than other pillows.3 According to a study published in Advances in Physiotherapy, the optimal pillow for neck pain should be soft, yet possess sufficient support for your neck's lordotic curve.4 Such a pillow, notes the researcher, can help decrease neck pain and headache and encourage heightened sleep quality. Your chiropractor may have various pillow samples available in his or her office from which to choose.

Please remember to avoid sleeping on your stomach during the early phases of your care, as this can provoke further damage to your injured tissues and delay the healing process. Consider sleeping in a slightly upright position with your head and neck bent forward a few degrees. It is important that you find a tolerable position for your head and neck - a position that does not place any additional strain on your injured tissues.

Symptoms and Warning Signs

The pain, inflammation, and muscle spasms you may experience with a whiplash injury will continue for several days post-accident as your injured tissues begin the healing process. You may also notice the following symptoms: headache, dizziness, impaired memory or concentration, and visual disturbances. These symptoms are common after whiplash injuries, and you should anticipate experiencing at least some of them during the acute phase of your injury, depending on the severity of your injury. If any of the following signs or symptoms arise, however, please contact your chiropractor immediately: numbness, tingling, or weakness in your arms or legs, personality changes, swallowing or breathing difficulties, severe pain, severe headache, clumsiness when walking, loss of consciousness, nausea or vomiting, seizures, or pupils that appear different in size.

Quote to Inspire

"Behold the turtle. He makes progress only when he sticks his neck out"

James Bryant Conant

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