Whiplash

A fact sheet about your recovery in the first 12 weeks

What is whiplash?

Whiplash is when your head moves suddenly in one direction and then back quickly. This movement may cause injury to your neck. Whiplash can happen in a car crash.

Neck pain is the most common symptom of whiplash. Other symptoms can include headaches, aching in the shoulders and arms, and dizziness or feeling light headed.

Some people may continue to have these symptoms during their recovery.

How long does it take to get better?

Most people recover from whiplash within a few days or weeks. Others may take several months to get better. Everyone's recovery is different.

Most people will be able to go on with usual activities. In fact, keeping active is good for recovery.

People who keep working, even if they can't do all of their usual work at first, have a better recovery than people who take a long time off work.

What should I do to help my recovery?

You can take an active role in your recovery in these three ways:



See your doctor



Stay active



Do your neck exercises



See your doctor

After your injury it is important to see your doctor.

Your doctor will do a medical check and advise you about treatment. In most cases x-rays and other tests are not needed for whiplash.

You may be asked to complete some questions about pain and any difficulties you are having. Your doctor will use this information to recommend treatment or medication for pain.

Talk to your doctor about how you can keep working and doing your usual activities during your recovery.

Your doctor might suggest that you see a health professional, who will treat your symptoms and give you neck exercises to help with your recovery.



Stay active

Try to keep doing your usual daily activities as much as you can. This will help you get better. Remember that some pain and discomfort is normal during the recovery process.

At first you might need to change the way you do some activities. Be creative and find new ways so you don't strain your neck. Examples are:

- Make more trips so you carry less when you are shopping, carrying garden supplies or moving boxes at work.
- Change the side you carry things like your child, laptop or gym bag.
- Change your posture more often, or get up and move around. Do this when you are working on your computer, watching TV or having dinner with friends and family.
- Do your usual activities over a few days rather than all at once. Vacuum one room each day or mow one section of the garden at a time.
- Use a step ladder to improve your position and avoid reaching overhead.
- Use a snorkel and goggles to swim if it is hard to turn your head to breathe.
- Lift the handlebars on your bike so you can change your posture.



Do your neck exercise

It is also helpful to do some neck exercises. The recommended exercises are very gentle and usually take about 10 minutes each day to complete.

Ask your doctor or health professional about the best exercises for you.