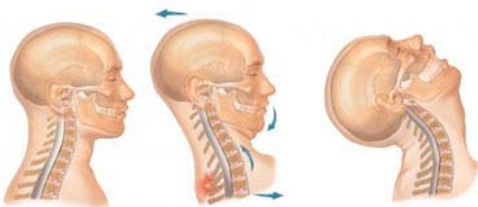


# WHIPLASH

The term whiplash refers to an injury to your neck which is caused by the head being thrown forward (flexion), then backward (extension). (See picture below)



Other terms for whiplash can be neck sprain or neck strain, and is an injury to the soft tissues (muscles, ligaments and tendons) of the neck. It most often occurs as a result of rear-end car crashes, but can also happen during a fall, or from an injury while playing contact sports such as football. Severe whiplash can also involve injury to the joints, discs, neck muscles and nerves. Symptoms may start right after the injury or may take several days to become noticeable.

## COMMON SYMPTOMS

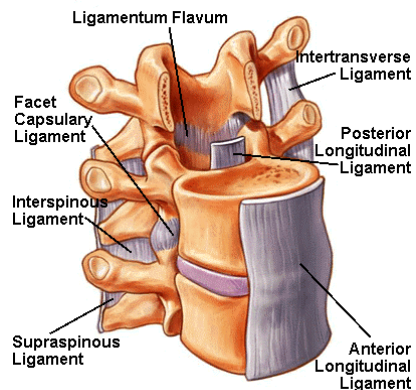
- Neck stiffness and/or pain
- Less movement in the neck
- Headache and dizziness
- Jaw pain
- Difficulty swallowing and chewing
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- Abnormal sensations such as burning or prickling in the neck or down the arms
- Shoulder pain
- Upper and/or lower back pain
- In more severe cases, loss of memory and concentration, depression, fatigue

## DIAGNOSIS OF WHIPLASH

Most often whiplash only causes damage to the soft tissues of the neck. If the accident was severe, x-rays might be taken to make sure there are no fractures (broken bones), but in most cases this is not necessary. The biggest risk associated with whiplash is not receiving proper treatment promptly enough. This can lead to improper healing where the injured tissues tighten up, and gradually get weaker. The longer this goes on, the harder it is to get better.



## TREATMENT

When whiplash is treated properly most symptoms resolve completely. The sooner you start treatment with your physiotherapist the better, because with prompt, effective treatment symptoms disappear faster and you will have a better result in the end. You should start right away to try to get back to your normal activities, but you have to respect the fact that your tissues are injured, and pace yourself sensibly.

- Initially the physiotherapist will do treatments to make you feel better. This might include gentle mobilization techniques, stretch, different machines such as ultrasound and possible heat or ice to help ease discomfort.
- As symptoms improve, exercises will be added to help gain range of motion and strength.
- The exercise program will be progressed to the point that exercises are done in the clinic as well as in a gym or at your home. These exercises will be designed to improve specific areas of weakness, as well as overall fitness.

It is essential to start a treatment plan as soon as possible. This plan should involve symptom relief, and emphasize returning to normal activities through well designed exercises and strategies to deal with your symptoms as you heal.