



Whiplash neck injury

You came to the emergency department with neck pain after a sudden jolt, such as a car crash. The doctor examined you and found no sign of a broken bone or nerve damage. This sheet explains how to help your neck recover.

What is it?

Whiplash happens when the head is suddenly thrown forwards and backwards, straining the muscles and ligaments of the neck. The neck may feel sore and stiff, often worse the next day. You may also have a headache or pain in the shoulders or upper back. Most people get much better within a few weeks. Keeping the neck moving helps it heal faster.

Looking after yourself at home

- Keep moving your neck gently. Resting it completely or using a neck collar can slow recovery.
- Gently turn your head side to side and tilt it up and down several times a day.
- A warm pack or a warm shower can ease stiff muscles.
- Keep a good posture, and take breaks from screens and long drives.
- Sleep on a firm, low pillow that keeps your neck in line with your body.
- Keep doing your usual activities as much as you can, and build up slowly.

Medicines

- Paracetamol can help the pain, unless your doctor told you not to. Follow the packet or your doctor's instructions.
- Ibuprofen may also help, unless your doctor told you not to. Avoid it with a stomach ulcer, kidney disease, some asthma, or pregnancy.
- Take pain relief regularly for the first few days so you can keep moving.

Follow-up

- See your family doctor or health centre if the pain is not improving after 1 to 2 weeks.
- Ask about physiotherapy if stiffness or pain lasts for several weeks.
- Do not drive until you can turn your head fully to check blind spots.

Come back to the emergency department or call an ambulance straight away if:

- Numbness, tingling or weakness in your arms or legs
- Trouble walking, or loss of balance
- Loss of control of your bladder or bowels
- Severe or worsening neck pain that is not eased by painkillers
- Severe headache, repeated vomiting, confusion, or drowsiness
- Trouble swallowing or speaking, or changes in your vision



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This leaflet is general information to support the advice your doctor or nurse gave you today. It does not replace their advice. If you are worried, seek medical help.

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