

Whiplash Type Injuries

A sudden forceful movement of the head, such as a road traffic accident, can cause a whiplash type injury. This involves injury to the soft tissues of the neck in a similar way to a sprained ankle. Treatment is also similar, i.e. rest, ice and then movement.

What can I do to help?

Rest: You may have been given a soft collar to wear to provide support and pain relief. After the first 48 hours following the injury, it is important that you remove the collar regularly throughout the day as using the collar for too long a period after the injury can result in a stiff neck and weak muscles. Aim to wean yourself off the collar after a week or so. Wearing a collar whilst you are a passenger in a car can be helpful. If you are the driver, you should not wear the collar unless you have first checked with your insurers, as this can invalidate your insurance.

Ice: Ice can help to relieve your pain and reduce the swelling in the tissues. Use a packet of frozen peas wrapped in a damp tea-towel, and place on your neck for up to 10 minutes at a time. You can repeat this several times a day if you wish.

Posture: It is important to maintain a good posture while the tissues are healing. Try to sit with a hollow at the base of your spine. You can use a lumbar cushion or rolled-up towel if you wish. Keep your head in neutral alignment and do not allow your chin to poke forwards. Try to avoid sitting for prolonged periods, get up and move around every 30 minutes.

Exercises to try:

Please try each one 2-10 times each hour. Some discomfort is normal as you may be moving muscles which are tight or stiff. Please stop them if they aggravate your pain.

1. Flexion and Extension



In sitting, drop your head down so you are looking at your toes. Hold for 2 seconds, and then raise your head so you are now looking up towards the ceiling. Hold for 2 seconds then relax. Repeat as able.

2. Retractions



In sitting, tuck your chin backwards as shown in the picture, ensuring your nose is kept level. Hold for a few seconds, before returning to the starting position. Repeat as able.

3. Rotations



In sitting, turn your head to look over your right shoulder, and hold for two seconds before repeating to the left. You can use your hand to gently apply a pressure to increase the stretch. Repeat throughout the day.

4. Side Flexion



In sitting, tilt your head to the side so that your ear moves towards your shoulder. Hold for a couple of seconds. Slowly return to an upright position before tilting your head to the other side. You can use your hand to help apply a pressure to increase the stretch.

Shoulder Exercises:

Shoulder Elevation/Depression: In sitting or standing, shrug your shoulders up towards your ears. Hold this position for a few seconds and then relax. Now lower your shoulders as much as you can by pulling your elbow towards your hips. Hold this for a few seconds and then relax.

Shoulder Protraction/Retraction: Round your back and push your shoulders forward. Hold for a few seconds and relax. Now pull your shoulders back and squeeze your shoulder blades together. Hold for a few seconds and relax.