

Physiotherapy Department

Advice for patients following whiplash injury

What is whiplash injury?

- It is soft tissue damage within the neck (ligaments and muscles) as a result of a sudden impact.
- Most whiplash injuries are not serious because of the large, strong muscles and ligaments that support and protect your neck. Usually there is no damage to the bones, nerves or discs in the spine, which is why it is not routine to X-ray your neck following an accident.
- You may get tingling sensations or pins and needles in your arms or shooting pains, but this is usually simple nerve irritation and resolves by itself.

How do I deal with a whiplash injury?

The old approach was to rest and wear a collar on the neck but the most recent research indicates that rest is not the most effective treatment and it is more beneficial to move.

Your neck can be very painful and often there is nothing to see but there are several things you can do:

- Control the pain with painkillers - seek advice from your GP or Pharmacist, or use an ice or heat pack. **Do not** use heat for the **first 48 hours**
- **Do the exercises your physiotherapist gives you**
- Remain active and get on with your daily activities as normally as possible
- Be aware of keeping a good posture when sleeping or sitting
- Good and bad days are part of getting better, so don't worry and persevere with the exercises

Main Messages

- Serious or permanent damage is rare. It is surprisingly difficult to seriously damage your neck
- Neck exercises are safe and effective and reduce the pain and help you to return to normality
- Be positive and stay active, do not let fear or worry hold back your recovery.
- The sooner you move your neck the better, so start the exercises as soon as possible
- Do not avoid doing things, keep up daily activities, they won't cause any damage



Patient Information

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