

# Whiplash



**A guide for patients**

For further advice and self care information you can:

Visit: [www.nhsinform.scot/msk](http://www.nhsinform.scot/msk)

Download: ‘MSK Help’ app free from app stores

## What is Whiplash?

Whiplash is a neck injury caused by a sudden movement of the head forwards, backwards or to the side and is most common following a vehicle collision. This movement can cause strain of the neck muscles and ligaments.

It is important to know:

* Permanent damage is rare
* Any serious injury would be picked up very early on
* The first couple of days following this injury are important – resting too much can prolong your symptoms.
* People who stay active and keep their neck mobile early on normally recover quicker from whiplash

## What are the symptoms of Whiplash?

Symptoms of Whiplash are not normally evident straight away and can develop over the first few days after the injury:

* Neck pain and stiffness
* Appearance of swollen muscles either side of the neck
* Reduced neck mobility
* Tenderness along the neck and shoulders
* Headaches
* Less common but can also occur – dizziness, some low back pain, pins and needles or numbness in the arms/ hands.

## How can I manage Whiplash?

* Seek advice from your local pharmacist regarding pain relief.
* Try heat or ice around your neck to help relax the tight muscles.
* Stay as active as possible and carry on with your normal activities. Modify tasks if you feel you need to.
* Try not to wear any neck collar provided to you for any more than a couple of days. Moving the neck is key to recovery!
* Carry out regular exercises.

**Exercises**

The following exercises should be done little and often throughout the day. When carrying these out, you should feel a stretchy type sensation, rather than pushing into pain. Make sure you stop the movement just shy of the pain.

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1. Sitting or standing. Gently pull your head back so it is in line with your shoulders. You should feel a slight stretch up the back of your neck. Hold for 5s.

Repeat 5 times.

2. Sitting or standing.

Slowly move your head to one side (ear towards shoulder) until you feel a stretch. Repeat to the other side.

Repeat 3-5 times.





3. Sitting or standing.

Slowly move your head forwards, moving your chin down to your chest, until you feel a stretch. Then come back up and move your head backwards, looking towards the ceiling.

Repeat 3-5 times.

4. Sitting or standing.

Slowly turn your head round to one side until you feel a stretch. Then rotate to the other side.

Repeat 3-5 times.



**If any of the exercises are too uncomfortable to do, please stop them and try again a day or two later.**