

Whiplash Treatment

Whiplash is a condition caused by injury to the soft tissue structures of the cervical spine or neck region.

Usually whiplash is a strain of the muscles or sprain of the ligaments that move and support the spine and head. Often whiplash occurs after a sudden, unexpected movement of extension of the neck, most commonly during a car crash.

Whiplash Symptoms

These signs and symptoms may occur immediately or minutes to hours after the initial injury. The sooner after the injury that symptoms develop, the greater the chance of serious damage.

- Neck pain
- Neck swelling
- Tenderness along the back of your neck
- Muscle spasms (in the side or back of your neck)
- Difficulty moving your neck around
- Headache
- Pain shooting from your neck into either shoulder or arm

When to Seek Medical Care

The best time to call your doctor is immediately after the injury. If you cannot determine whether an emergency department visit is needed for your symptoms, then contact your doctor and ask for advice. If your doctor is unavailable at the time of your injury, then you should call 911 for transport to the emergency department. The risks associated with a possible neck injury are far too great to attempt to diagnose and treat yourself. You should see a doctor and have your neck braced to keep your head from moving during transport.

Depending on the severity of your car accident, emergency medical personnel may take you to an emergency department immediately. In this case, a cervical collar will be placed around your neck, and your body will be strapped to a long, firm board to prevent any movements until a doctor sees you.

With less severe car accidents, sports injuries, or other accidental injuries, emergency medical services may or may not be involved in your prehospital care. You should call 911 emergency medical services if you develop any of the following symptoms shortly after your injury:

- Neck pain
- Pain in either or both arms
- Shoulder pain
- Headache
- Dizziness
- Weakness or loss of function