

## HOW CAN I PREVENT CHRONIC NECK PAIN?

Research shows that inactivity can do more harm than good. It is for this reason that neck collars are no longer recommended. Active range of motion and gentle stretching are initiated as soon as possible following your whiplash injury. Although this may be uncomfortable at first, movement will lead to decreased pain and dysfunction over time.

Recent studies indicate that it is very important to strengthen the deep neck musculature post whiplash. These muscles are short and small, and help control the movements of each individual joint in the neck, thus providing stability. With acute neck pain / whiplash injuries, these muscles are inhibited and do not function properly. Your physiotherapist will explain how these muscles work and give you specific exercises to retrain their proper length, strength and function. With return of good muscular control, and proper postural positioning, you can avoid chronic neck pain.

For treatment of your  
Whiplash Injuries,

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[www.expertphysio.ca](http://www.expertphysio.ca)

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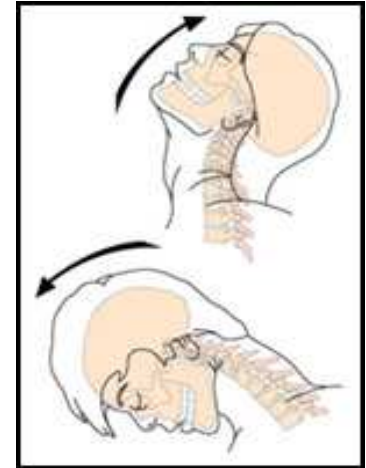


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### Our Mission Statement:

**Our Expert services are committed and caring. We continue to excel in serving generations of the Burnaby Community.**

## Whiplash



Physiotherapists  
Your Body Specialists

## I THINK I HAVE WHIPLASH WHAT IS IT?

Whiplash is an acceleration-deceleration mechanism of energy transfer to the neck. It may result from rear end or side impact motor vehicle collisions, but can also occur during diving or other mishaps. The impact of the head whipping forward and backwards leads to soft tissue and bony injury of the neck and upper back region. You feel this as stiffness and pain.

## WHY DOES MY NECK HURT?

The spine is a complex system of interlocking, moving pieces. The bones or vertebrae that make up the spinal column are separated by discs, which act as shock absorbers that support and distribute the weight of your head. Also, the spinal column is wrapped tightly in ligaments and supported by muscle. Major nerves connecting the spinal cord with other parts of the body pass through spaces between these vertebrae. All of these tissues have pain nerve endings, so when injured they can hurt, causing neck, shoulder, and upper back pain.

Occasionally, a nerve may be irritated by inflammation in the area, or by pressure from a bulging disc. This can cause radiating pain, numbness, or tingling to the shoulder, elbow and/or hand.

Often headaches may accompany the injury. This may be due to muscular tension but can also be the result of joint injury in the upper neck region. As well, the impact may result in brain bruising/ concussion which can cause headaches, or diminished mental acuity.

## WILL I GET BETTER?

Clinical research shows that most people recover fully from whiplash. The recovery period can range from 24 to 48 hours for a very mild injury and up to 6 months or more for a more significant injury. The average patient recovers within 6 to 12 weeks.

Your body will go through 3 stages of healing after every injury:

1. **Stage One:** 3-5 days post injury. This Acute Stage is characterized by inflammation. Pain and swelling need to be reduced and managed. Active range of motion and gentle stretching exercises are initiated as soon as possible. Soft neck collars are not recommended.
2. **Stage Two:** 5 days to 8 weeks post injury. This Sub-acute Stage is characterized by the repair process. New connective tissue is laid down to mend the injured tissues. Movement and exercise are critical at this stage to let the body know where and how much new tissue to lay down, and to reprogram normal movement patterns.
3. **Stage Three:** 8 weeks to 18 months post injury. This Remodeling Stage is characterized by rebuilding and renovation of healthy tissue. Exercises to restore flexibility, strength, stability and endurance are necessary to complete this stage of healing.

Research indicates that delayed treatment can be a factor in poor recovery. Therefore, if you are still experiencing pain or decreased function 2 or 3 days after your car accident, see a physiotherapist. The physiotherapist will help to decrease your pain and return you to full function, whether you are an avid gardener or a soccer player!

## PHYSIOTHERAPY TREATMENT FOR WHIPLASH INJURIES

Physiotherapists are university trained professionals who are uniquely qualified to assess whiplash injuries and to provide comprehensive rehabilitation programs. The goal of physiotherapy is to treat your injuries quickly and effectively, and to safely return you to normal activities as soon as possible.

Physiotherapy treatment includes the following components, depending on the assessment findings, the clinical diagnosis, and your individual goals and needs.

- Pain management using modalities such as heat, ice, and electrical stimulation. Education regarding posture, resting positions, exercises, pacing, breathing techniques, and stress management are also aspects of pain management.
- Manual therapy including joint and soft tissue mobilization and manipulation to restore normal joint motion and tissue flexibility.
- Exercise programs to improve flexibility, strength, endurance, and stability, with integration into community gyms as appropriate.
- Education to prevent the delay of optimal recovery from your injury including information re: posture, pathology, anatomy, ergonomics, and return to work and sport considerations.