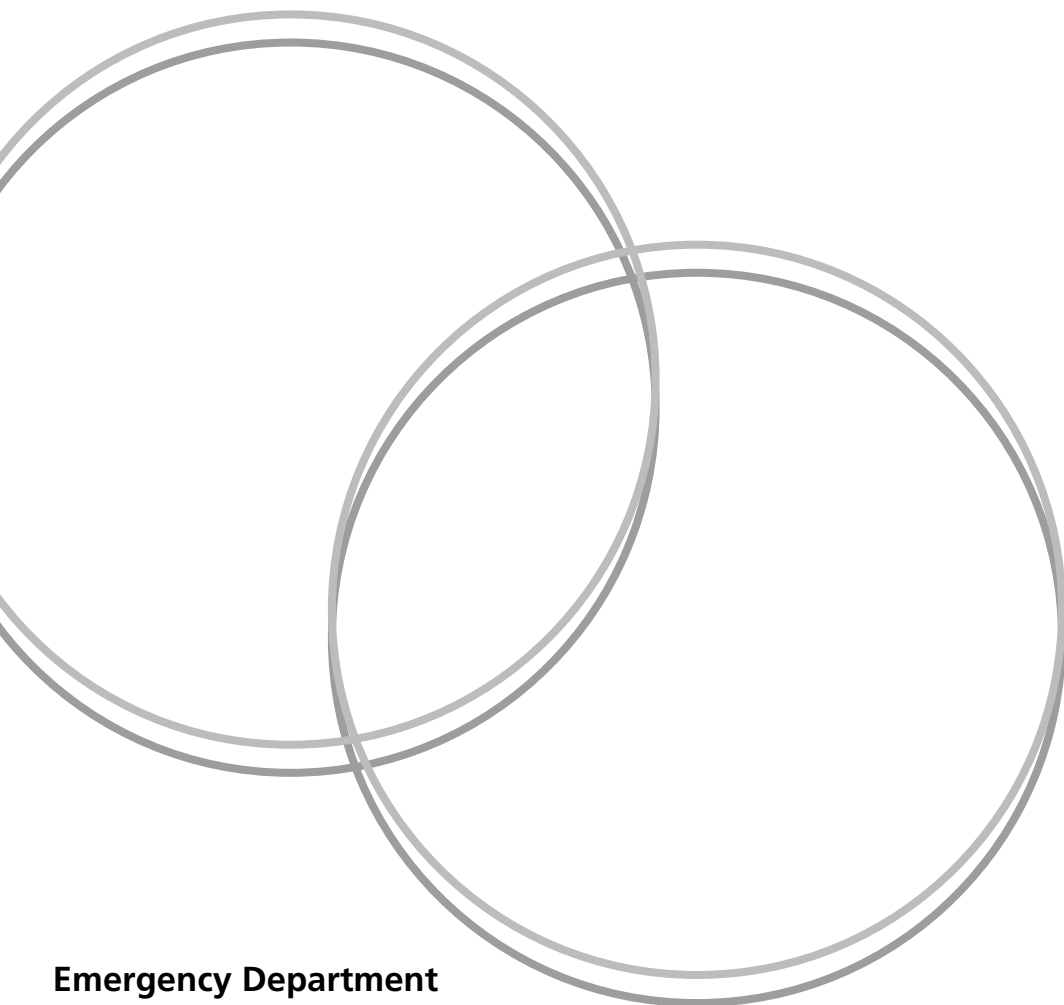




Oxford University Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Neck Sprain (Whiplash type injury)

Information for patients



Emergency Department

## **What is a whiplash neck sprain?**

A whiplash neck sprain occurs when your head is suddenly jolted backwards and forwards in a whip-like movement. This can cause some of the muscles and ligaments within your neck to stretch.

## **What are the symptoms?**

- Pain and stiffness in your neck, jaw, shoulders, arms or lower back
- Inability to move your neck properly
- Dizziness, headache, blurred vision, pain on swallowing
- Difficulty in concentrating

## **How is it treated?**

The treatment is based on management of pain and continuation of normal daily activities. The following are recommended:

- Use a pillow to support your neck whilst sitting or lying in bed.
- Sleeping on your back or your side provides a better position for your neck.
- Applying an ice pack over the sore area for 5-10 minutes for the first couple of days can provide pain relief and relax muscle spasm.

## **Painkillers**

You can take painkillers such as paracetamol or a paracetamol/codeine mixture (e.g. co-codamol) and anti-inflammatories such as ibuprofen. These tablets can be taken together. Please see the patient information leaflets enclosed with the medication for instructions on dosage.

# Rehabilitation and recovery

As healing gets underway, it is important that you begin a series of exercises to regain normal neck movement. They will not cause you any harm.

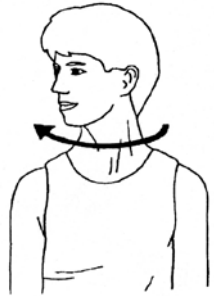
## Exercises

1. Straighten up and look ahead. Try to touch your ear down to your shoulder. Repeat with the other side. Do not shrug your shoulders.



©PhysioTools Ltd

2. Straighten up; now look round over each shoulder in turn.



©PhysioTools Ltd

3. Straighten up; look upwards as if trying to point your chin to the ceiling, then downwards, putting your chin on your chest.



©PhysioTools Ltd

4. Moving your arms stretches your shoulder muscles. Shrug your shoulders while breathing in and then relax them while breathing out. Try rolling them at the same time.



©PhysioTools Ltd

5. Circle your arms, one at a time, backwards and forwards – like swimming crawl and backstroke.



©PhysioTools Ltd

6. Making your neck muscles work without actually moving your head will reduce both fatigue and pain. Put your hand on the side of your head and apply increasing pressure. As you resist, you will feel your muscles contracting. Maintain the force for 10 seconds and then gradually release. Repeat on the other side.

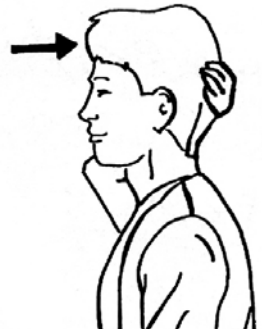


©PhysioTools Ltd

- Put your hand on your forehead and push forwards against your hand; then put your hand behind your head and push backwards against your hand. Maintain the force for 10 seconds and then gradually release.



©PhysioTools Ltd



©PhysioTools Ltd

Repeat these seven exercises about ten times every hour. Each day stretch your neck a little further.

## Remember

- Any initial neck pain you experience when carrying out the exercises will decrease as the movement in your neck becomes easier.
- The more you exercise your neck, the faster your recovery will be.
- If the pain seems to get worse, do the exercises less frequently and through a smaller range until the pain eases.
- Aches or twinges can persist or recur for quite a long time after injury.
- Do not stay in one position for too long as you will stiffen up.
- Tense muscles caused by anxiety and stress can increase the amount of discomfort you feel. You may find exercise, controlled breathing and relaxation helpful.
- Keep up daily activities – they will not cause damage. Don't completely avoid things; if it is too painful; just alter the way you do them.
- If you don't manage to get back to most normal activities within six weeks, or your neck is not recovering at the rate you expect, please see your GP.

If you experience:

- Severe pain despite taking analgesia
- Tingling or pins and needles on one or both sides of your body
- Problems with walking or sitting upright
- Sudden "electric shock" feeling in your neck and back which might also go down arms and legs.
- Weakness in the arms or legs

These could be a sign of damage to the nerves in the neck, contact your GP or call 111 for an urgent assessment.

## Feedback

If you would like to tell us anything about your experience in the Emergency Department, please speak to the nurse in charge. Alternatively you can contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service. (PALS)

Email: **PALS@ouh.nhs.uk**

Call: **01865 221 473**  
**01295 229 259**

You can also email: **feedback@ouh.nhs.uk**

For more information, please visit: **www.ouh.nhs.uk**

## For further information or advice

Please contact your GP or NHS 111 (dial 111 (freephone) from any landline or mobile).

## Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

Author: Emergency Nurse Practitioner team  
September 2022  
Review: September 2025  
Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust  
[www.ouh.nhs.uk/information](http://www.ouh.nhs.uk/information)



*Making a difference across our hospitals*

[charity@ouh.nhs.uk](mailto:charity@ouh.nhs.uk) | 01865 743 444 | [hospitalcharity.co.uk](http://hospitalcharity.co.uk)

OXFORD HOSPITALS CHARITY (REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER 1175809)

