

Emergency Department

# Whiplash neck sprain

Advice for patients



## 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?

- 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.

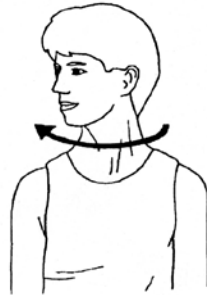
## Exercises

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.



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



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



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- 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.



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



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- 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.

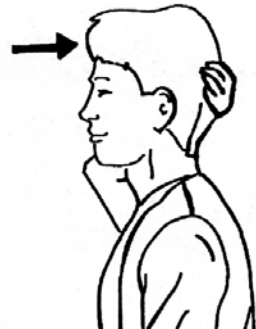


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7. Put your hand on your forehead and push forwards against your hand; then put your hand behind your head and push backwards against your hand. Maintain the force for 10 seconds and then gradually release.



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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.

## How to contact us / further information

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact:

**Minor side, Emergency Department**

John Radcliffe Hospital

Tel: **(01865) 220224**

Or contact your GP.

If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221473** or email **PALSJR@orh.nhs.uk**

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