

What is Whiplash?

Whiplash-a soft tissue injury to the neck-is also called neck sprain/strain or neck strain. It is characterized by a collection of symptoms that occur following damage to the neck, usually because of sudden extension and flexion. The disorder commonly occurs as the result of an automobile accident and may include injury to intervertebral joints, discs and ligaments, cervical muscles, and nerve roots. Symptoms such as neck pain may be present directly after the injury or may be delayed for several days. In addition to neck pain, other symptoms may include neck stiffness, injuries to the muscles and ligaments (myofascial injuries), headache, dizziness, abnormal sensations such as burning or prickling (paresthesias) or shoulder or back pain. In addition, some people experience cognitive, somatic, or psychological conditions such as memory loss, concentration impairment, nervousness/irritability, sleep disturbances, fatigue or depression.

Is there any treatment?

Treatment for individuals with whiplash may include pain medications, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, muscle relaxants and a cervical collar in extreme cases. Range of motion exercises, physical therapy and cervical traction may also be prescribed. Supplemental heat application may relieve muscle tension after the first 72 hours.

What is the prognosis?

Generally, prognosis for individuals with whiplash is good. The neck and head pain clears within a few days or weeks. Most patients recover within 3 months after the injury, however, some may continue to have residual neck pain and headaches.