



Whiplash

What is Whiplash?

Whiplash is defined as an acute acceleration/ deceleration injury to the cervical spine (neck), where the head is flung forwards and backwards at high speeds. Whiplash injury can result in damage to the joints within the neck, the bones, the soft tissue surrounding the neck or damage to the neural tissue. It can cause widespread pain to the neck, head, shoulders and arms.

How does it happen?

Whiplash most commonly occurs in high-speed motor vehicle accidents, however, it can also occur in sporting activities and falls.

What can a physiotherapist do?

The physiotherapist will provide a thorough assessment of your neck and thorax, and then determine the extent of your whiplash injury. If a fracture or serious damage is suspected the physiotherapist will refer you for further medical attention and imaging and can refer you for X-rays if required.

Initial treatment of a whiplash injury requires rest and avoidance from aggravating activity. Ice and anti-inflammatories may be recommended in the initial phase to reduce swelling. Correct posture is vital to avoid increased strain on the neck and aid recovery. The physiotherapist may provide postural taping or a neck brace to assist with this.

The physiotherapist will also provide further treatment to assist in optimal recovery including soft tissue massage, mobilisations, dry needling and electrotherapy. A rehabilitation program will be designed to help increase the movement, strength and stability of your neck and surrounding musculature.

The physiotherapist may also provide recommendations on appropriate pillows to provide your neck with the best support whilst sleeping.

What about work/sport?

Return to work and/or sport will vary greatly depending on the extent of your injury and the demands of your work and/or sport. In the initial stages of a whiplash injury sustained positions, heavy lifting and high-intensity activity is not recommended therefore restricted hours and duties may be required. The physiotherapist will be able to provide you with the relevant ergonomic advice for returning to work.

Outcome

The overall outcome for whiplash injuries depends on the extent and severity of damage sustained. Best outcomes are seen with appropriate rehabilitation.