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WHIPLASH

whip-lash (hwîp-lâsh) n.

1. An abrupt snapping motion or change of direction resembling the lash of a whip.
2. Also, whiplash injury, a neck injury caused by a sudden jerking backward, forward, or both, of the head.



Whiplash is most commonly associated with rear-end car collisions, in which the impact suddenly forces the car occupants' heads to "snap" back and forth. Other causes of whiplash include a sudden jerk of one or both arms, a violent blow to the head or chin, a reflex jerking of the head due to fright or a sudden loud noise, or any kind of fall that causes a forceful movement of the head and neck. *Anyone can be subjected to whiplash, even in a low-force car crash at speeds as low as 5 m.p.h.*

Where does it hurt?

The sudden, violent thrust and recoil of the neck and head damages the surrounding and supporting tissues, including muscles, tendons, and ligaments. Whiplash most commonly causes lingering (often serious) neck pain and stiffness, but there may also be back pain, headaches, blurred vision, nausea, ringing in the ears, numbness, and even dizziness. Whiplash symptoms may or may not appear right away. After a night's rest or even longer, you will usually experience stiffness or soreness of the neck. Often victims are stunned immediately after an accident and do not note any of the whiplash effects. It's possible that old whiplash injuries can be the cause of many physical and psychological symptoms, even years after the accident, especially if a victim does not receive proper care quickly.

Avoiding Whiplash

Dr. Arthur Croft, a doctor of chiropractic who is a whiplash injury expert, shares six ways to minimize pain and suffering before and after a whiplash accident.

1. **Shop for a Safer Car:** Before you buy your next car, compare vehicle structural design, vehicle size and weight, and restraint systems - belts, air bags, head restraints, and crash avoidance features. Small cars put you and your passengers at greater risk, so consider mass and crash-worthiness. Also, check Insurance Institute Highway Safety ratings.
2. **Keep head rests in UP position:** Eighty percent of cars have the head restraint adjusted in the LOW position, yet research reveals that having no head restraint is safer than

having one in the LOW position. Some add-on head restraints are available, but check first for safety and ease of installation.

3. **No crush, no crash?** Within a certain range of crash speeds, when there is NO DAMAGE to the vehicle, whiplash injuries are more prevalent than when the vehicle is damaged. There is less damage to transmit to the occupant when more energy is used up in crushing parts of the car.

4. **Seek treatment immediately:** It is a huge advantage to a victim's recovery to begin treating the whiplash injury within two weeks after the accident. Immediate treatment will decrease the likelihood of a painful, chronic condition.

5. **Do what your doctor orders:** Exercises, ice, nutrition, soft collars for the first few days, adjusted work stations, deep tissue work in the early stages - do exactly what your doctor prescribes.

6. **Think ergonomically:** Positions to avoid, how to sleep, conditions at work - these are everyday factors that can hasten healing.

Prepare to Crash!

Most accidents happen lightning fast, but if you do have time to prepare, use these tips to minimize whiplash injury:

- Put your head and your neck all the way back so that you are in contact with the seat back and the properly adjusted head restraint.
- Straight-arm the steering wheel and get a good grip.
- If you are completely stopped, put your foot on the brake as hard as you can.
- Look straight ahead, not in the rearview mirror. Do not have your head turned.
- Put your neck back slightly so your eyes are looking at about the top of the windshield.
- Scrunch your shoulders up toward your ears and brace for impact.

Chiropractic Can Help!

Chiropractic techniques and the skills of doctors of chiropractic are particularly well-suited to relieving the neck pain and other debilitating effects of whiplash. A recent study in the *Journal of Orthopedic Medicine* revealed the superiority of chiropractic care in whiplash injuries. Repeated and effective chiropractic adjustments have proved successful for many thousands of patients. If you've experienced a whiplash episode, don't delay - see your doctor of chiropractic today!

Thank you to Dr. Arthur Croft of The Spine Research Institute of San Diego and the American Chiropractic Assoc (www.amerchiro.org) for information used in this newsletter.