

Patient Information : Neck Sprain

Cork Emergency Medicine

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Road accidents can cause a strain injury of the neck muscles. When the impact occurs the forces transmitted to the head cause it to rock backwards and forwards stressing the neck muscles. Pain is commonly felt in the back of the neck; from the base of the skull down towards the shoulder blades and towards the spine. Pain may be present immediately or develop later, often overnight, giving morning pain and stiffness.

Treatment

- Rest** Avoiding heavy work / lifting (housework is heavy work, especially ironing & vacuuming)
- Warmth** Is comforting, e.g. baths, showers, hot water bottle, warm clothes
- Time** Neck sprains can take several weeks to settle
- Exercise** Mobility aids recovery; do the exercises on the neck exercise sheet regularly prevent muscle spasm
- Painkillers** Regular use is recommended, especially at first
- Talking** Tell your partner or close friends how you really feel.
Don't be afraid to feel upset, and say so.

Common symptoms after road crash neck injury

These can last several weeks or sometimes a few months after a neck sprain injury. Usually they are not serious, but can be troublesome. (The most commonly reported symptoms are listed first.)

- Headache and dizziness
- Depression
- Tiredness
- Impaired sleep
- Backache
- Anxiety about driving or traffic
- Cracking noises from the neck
- Tingling or "pins and needles" in or or both arms
- Irritability and loss of drive
- Tearfulness, easily upset
- Poor concentration, Forgetfulness
- Flashbacks and upsetting memories



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1. Act as usual – you may have pain but maintaining your normal activities is an important factor in getting better.
2. Stay at work if you can. People who stay at work after injury recover more quickly than those who take time off.
3. Do not sleep with more pillows than necessary and ensure the pillows are comfortable and provides support. Do not sleep face down, as this is likely to strain the neck further.
4. Exercise gently as the symptoms lessen (2-3 days). Gently start moving the head from side to side (i.e. to look over each shoulder). Perform exercise 4-6 times and about 5-6 times daily.
5. Symptoms (pain and stiffness) should begin to subside within a few days, and may be helped with the use of over the counter medication such as Paracetamol and/ or Ibuprofen. If they persist or worsen, you should contact your GP or return to the hospital, as further treatment may be necessary.
6. Relaxing both mind and body helps manage any pain more easily.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE USE OF SOFT COLLARS

Soft collars are seldom used nowadays. Your doctor or physiotherapist will decide if one is appropriate for you.

Soft collars should not be worn for more than 3-5 days as this may slow your recovery. The purpose of the collar is to hold the head and neck still; therefore it needs to be fastened snugly in place.

- Wear the collar day and night for the first few days.
- Remove collar several times each day for a few minutes and carry out exercises (See no. 4)
- You should remove collar if you have difficulty swallowing or sleeping.
- As the pain lessens gradually increase the time when collar is not worn.

Source- Adapted from :

1. Jull, GA (2001) *Pain and Disability: Is there a difference between traumatic and non traumatic neck pain?* 1st Int. Conference on Movement Dysfunction – Edinburgh.
2. Motor Accidents Authority Sydney NSW 2001- “ Your Guide to Whiplash Recovery “. Web site: www.maa.nsw.gov.au

