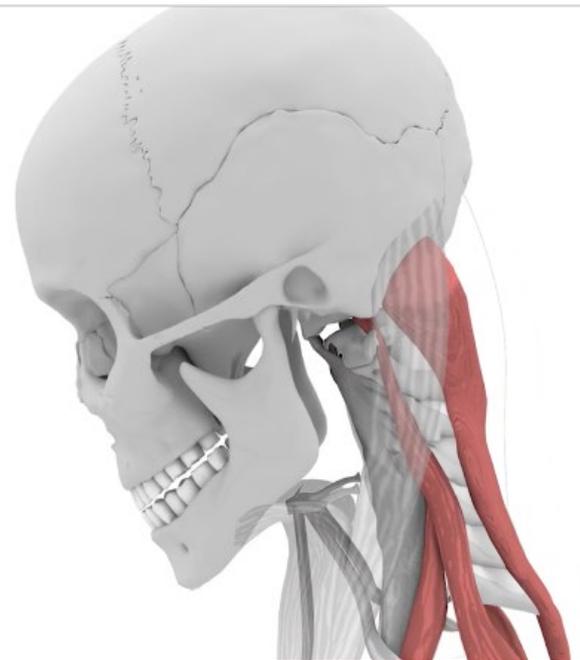


Whiplash

A whiplash injury is most commonly thought of as an injury sustained during a car accident. However, it can occur during any incident where there is a sudden change in speed on the body.

Your head is heavy, weighing approximately 5kg. Your muscles and soft tissues surrounding your neck do a very good job of supporting your head most of the time. But if exposed to a sudden change in force, such as those experienced in a sports tackle, the demand placed on these supportive structures exceeds their ability, and so the control of your head is lost.

As your head is thrown, your soft tissues, including your ligaments and muscles, are over stretched. Your muscles suddenly tense to protect your head.



As the tissues around your neck reach their limit of stretch, your head stops and is rapidly pulled in the opposite direction. This movement over stretches the soft tissues supporting the other side of your neck, triggering the muscles around this area to suddenly tighten in protection too. As a consequence of this rapid movement of the head, all the tissues become inflamed.

The first few days following your injury tend to be the worst.



Whilst you will want to spend a lot of the time allowing your neck to recover, holding it rigidly in one position will likely exacerbate your pain. Performing some gentle neck movements will help to minimise this. In the early days these are often best done whilst lying on your back.

Be careful you do not start tensing other parts of your body. Relax your shoulders, keep your neck long and your shoulder blades rested back and down.

In the first few days, applying ice to your neck will help to settle the inflammation in your muscles and other tissues.

Use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatories can help you to manage the acute symptoms of inflammation. Painkillers help you to prevent tensing your other muscles, and ease the pain enough for you to be able to sleep.

After a few days, place heat on the muscles over the top of your shoulders and your upper back to aid relaxation in these areas.

When at work, make sure you are able to hold your head in a neutral position, and gently stretch your neck every 15 minutes.



As your pain reduces and your exercises become easier, you can increase the depth of your stretches. This may be a few days after your injury depending on the severity of your pain.

You may also experience pain in your upper back, so it is important to stretch this area out too. Throughout your recovery, stretches are best done little and often.

You may be left with feelings of weakness around your neck. Building strength back into your muscles is key to getting your full recovery. Your clinician will guide you through your exercises at a rate appropriate for you.