

DESCRIPTION

Injury to the neck, caused when it is whipped forcefully backward and then forward, usually in an accident. Body areas involved are the muscles, tendons, ligaments, disks, and nerves in the neck. The muscles tighten as they try to control the motion of the head.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Pain in the front and back of the neck either immediately following or up to 24 hours after injury.
- Stiffness in the neck.
- Difficulty moving neck around.
- Pain may go into the shoulder or arm.
- Headache.

CAUSES

Injury, usually from a motor-vehicle accident or contact sport. It may also be caused by being punched or hit by a falling object, or rarely, in cases of child abuse.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

It is normal to experience stiffness and pain, particularly in the neck and shoulder areas, over the next few days. The injury is usually not serious and permanent damage is rare. Most people recover in a few weeks to 3 months.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Temporary numbness and weakness in the arms, if nerve roots are injured. This may persist until recovery.
- A few may have symptoms for a year, while others may have some symptoms even after two years. It may affect quality of life for a person. Depression may occur.

GENERAL MEASURES

- Treatment will depend on the extent of the injury. Steps may include medications and/or injections, physical therapy, exercises, massage, chiropractor care, heat or ice, wearing a neck collar, ultrasound, or traction. You and your health care provider can discuss a treatment plan for your individual needs.
- Apply ice packs (over a towel) to the injured area for 10 to 20 minutes each hour during the first 24 hours.
- After 24 hours, use ice packs or heat to relieve pain. Heat may include warm showers twice a day, in which the water beats on your neck for 10 to 20 minutes. Between showers, apply warm soaks to the neck several times a day for 10 to 15 minutes.
- Surgery to remove an injured spinal disk (rare).

MEDICATIONS

- Pain relievers or muscle relaxants may be prescribed.
- Oral steroids may also be prescribed to reduce inflammation.
 - You should begin your steroid prescription today.
 - You should begin your steroid prescription tomorrow.

Your doctor also recommends the following over-the-counter medication. This medication may offer significant symptom relief:

- For mild pain use ibuprofen or naproxen.
- Unless your doctor tells you differently, always finish the full course of your steroid prescription, even if you start to feel better.
- Steroids may interfere with the effectiveness of birth control pills. Use an alternative method of contraception for the remainder of the month after finishing your steroid prescription.

SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IF:

- Pain, numbness, tingling, or weakness develops in the arm, face or legs.
- You experience a loss of bowel or bladder control.
- A feeling as if the neck is unstable develops.
- Increased Pain
- New, unexplained symptoms develop.
- You develop any new or unexplained symptoms.