

Accidents and whiplash

What is whiplash? Whiplash occurs when the neck is violently thrown forward and then back again or viseversa. Auto accidents are the most common way to get whiplash but not the only way. For example, think about what happens when you shake a child. Yes, that's right, the head is thrown back and forth which can cause a whiplash injury. The child may develop similar symptoms as someone in an auto accident. This is why you should never shake children. Keeping that in mind anytime the head is put through that range of motion with enough force, it will cause a whiplash injury. The reason you get all the secondary problems with whiplash is you actually tear the muscle fibers during the trauma. Muscle heals and forms scar tissue. It also may stay in a contracted state which will decrease the blood supply to that muscle. This will not allow the waste products to leave the muscle and the scar tissue decreases the range of motion of that muscle. Why is this a problem? The waste products will cause pain in the muscle and even refer pain to different areas. The scar tissue restricts full motion of that muscle (you start to feel stiff and loose the motion you once had).

There are a number of different signs and symptoms that may arise after a whiplash injury and not all of them will show up immediately. The most common is neck pain, decreased range of motion and weakness. This will occur within a few hours or days. Headaches may also start to develop. Some other less common symptoms are dizziness, tinnitus (ringing in the ear), jaw and teeth pain, ear pain, a feeling of tightness or burning in the neck and upperback musculature, face and eye pain, blurred vision, sinusitis, and hand numbness. These symptoms may not appear for days, weeks, or even months after the trauma. What do all of these things have in common? They can all occur with injury to the neck muscles. Whiplash is the sprain/strain of the cervical musculature.

The most important thing to remember is, these symptoms don't have to turn into a chronic condition. With proper treatment, these problems can all be resolved

when they are muscle related. Even chronic conditions can be helped even though they take much longer to rehabilitate.

Headaches commonly refer from the neck and upper back muscles. The headaches may be felt in the back of the neck or in various parts of the head. Headaches may also be associated with pain behind the eyes or pain in the ears. This pain usually develops on the side as the head pain but not always. Some patients will feel pain in the sinus region without having headaches. Dizziness may develop when injury affects the upper trapezius musculature. Headaches will usually occur with the dizziness but not always. Tinnitus may occur when the sternocleidomastoid, upper trapezius, cervical paraspinal, or masseter muscle is injured. Blurred vision and even the dimming of light may be secondary to a trauma to the sternocleidomastoid muscles. Hand numbness can be referred from the posterior cervical musculature.

If you have any of these symptoms it is important to find out the cause. Although it may be muscle related, you have to rule out the more serious problems first. The Rehab and Pain Center focuses on the diagnosis and treatment of muscle related injuries and can help in ruling out a more serious problem. With auto related injuries insurance will usually cover treatment 100 percent. For more information, call 215/234-REHAB.