
PATIENT INFORMATION – NECK INJURY

Minor neck sprains normally occur after a car accident. This is most commonly known as whiplash. Pain will develop in the muscles in the neck, and this may not occur until a few hours after the incident.

Symptoms usually ease, but in the first 24-36 hours your neck may be painful and stiff.

Try and keep your neck moving, and take the recommended * painkillers regularly to relieve any pain or discomfort. If the pain continues, seek advice from your GP.

Treatment

- Try to keep your neck moving as normal as possible. Pain may be bad in the beginning and you may need to rest the neck but gently move it as soon as you can. Do not let it stiffen up.
- Your neck may be painful, but keeping it mobile from an early stage will improve its functionality and speed up your recovery. Any pain you experience when moving your neck is normal and will not cause further damage.
- Paracetamol* can be used to treat mild to moderate pain
- Physiotherapy may be recommended

Things to help:

Self care

As well as keeping your neck mobile and using painkillers, the self care measures below may also help you manage the pain and stiffness in your neck and prevent them getting worse.

- **Good posture** – always maintain a good, upright posture by keeping your back straight while sitting, standing and walking. If

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you spend a lot of time using a computer, you should adjust your chair and computer screen correctly.

- **Supportive pillow** – some people find a firm, supportive pillow helps when sleeping. Avoid using more than one pillow.
- **Exercises and stretches** – controlled exercises, such as those used in activities like yoga, will help improve your strength and posture. However, there is no evidence they help reduce neck pain.

Recovery

The length of time it will take to recover from whiplash depends on how severely your neck has been sprained.

It may take a few weeks if the ligaments and tendons in your neck are only slightly damaged. However, in severe cases, whiplash and whiplash-associated injuries can last several months or over a year.

Further Advice/Instructions

Please use this section to give the patient specific information e.g. follow up appointments or after care advice.

*Pain relief advice

You may have been given some pain relief by the health professionals in the Accident and Emergency Department. If this runs out and you need further pain relief, you can speak to a pharmacist for advice. Some common painkillers are available to buy over the counter, for e.g. paracetamol or ibuprofen. Always follow the instructions on the packet if you are taking these, and seek further advice from the pharmacist should you have any concerns, particularly if it is for a child.

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If you become unwell or are injured, choose the right NHS service to make sure you get the best treatment. The Choose Well campaign explains what each NHS service does, and when it should be used.

Choosing well means that you and your family will get the best treatment. It also allows busy NHS services to help the people who need them most.

If you are unsure about which option to choose, please call NHS Direct Wales on 0845 46 47 or visit the Choose Well website at www.choosewellwales.org.uk

This information has been produced based on previous information leaflets and the evidence available at the time of publication. It has been clinically reviewed however if you notice anything that needs updating or amending please contact ppi.team@wales.nhs.uk

If you require this information in another language or format please ask a member of staff.

For further advice or information contact NHS Direct Wales 0845 46 47
www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk