

Soft tissue injuries of the neck

Patient Information

Introduction

Soft tissue injuries of the neck are commonly caused by trauma such as a road traffic collision. A sudden movement or jolt to the neck causes the soft tissue (muscles and ligaments) around the neck to be stretched or strained.

Symptoms

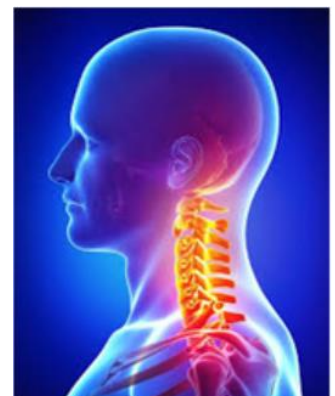
Symptoms often do not appear immediately but in the first few days following your injury.

Common symptoms are:

- Neck pain and stiffness
- Pain in the shoulders or down the arms
- Back pain
- Headaches
- Muscle spasms

Less commonly:

- Pins and needles in the arms or hands
- Temporary dizziness, blurred vision or ringing in the ears
- Jaw pain
- Sleeping difficulties
- Fatigue



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When to seek help from a doctor

If you lost consciousness or had immediate neck pain, seek help urgently.

If you have a combination of the following symptoms that are not improving after a few days speak to your GP:

- Dizziness
- Difficulty swallowing
- Fainting/blackout
- Slurring of speech
- Blurred vision
- Severe headaches
- Nausea/vomiting

Early management

There are many things you can do to help ease your symptoms. It is suggested to achieve the best outcome to use a combination of these things:

Keep moving – Try and keep your neck mobile. Continue your normal activities unless the pain is too severe. Collars and neck braces are not recommended.

Pain relief – may not be needed if the pain is mild. Painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen can be useful to ease pain. Speak to your GP if you are unsure what to take or need stronger pain relief.

Sleeping positions – Sleep on a supportive mattress and avoid sleeping on your front. Try to keep your head and neck in line with your spine. This may require 1 or 2 pillows depending on their thickness. Many people find it helpful to place a small, rolled towel along the bottom edge of the pillowcase.

Posture – Try to avoid staying in one position for long periods, it is important to keep moving. You may find the following ideas useful in the first few weeks.

- When watching TV or using a computer or mobile devices keep the screen in front of you and avoid twisting or looking downwards. Keep screen time to a minimum.
- When driving avoid sitting with the shoulders hunched and chin poking forwards. Position your seat in a position that is comfortable for you.

Exercises – these should be started within a few days of your injury and will help with increasing movement and decreasing pain. Try the simple exercises below. You can expect to feel some discomfort but avoid moving into excessive pain. Stop and seek help if the exercises make the pain worse. You may find it easier to start the exercises lying on your back with the neck supported and progress to doing them in sitting as your symptoms ease. Complete these exercises little and often.

Simple neck exercises

1. Roll your shoulders in small circles 5 times forwards then 5 times backwards.
2. Slowly turn your head to look over one shoulder then repeat to the other side. Repeat 5 times.
3. Slowly tilt your head over in one direction then tilt to the other side. Repeat 5 times.
4. Slow controlled movements looking down and back up. Repeat 5 times

Outcome

In many cases symptoms will begin to improve after a few days, but it can take a few months for them to resolve completely. There are a number of factors that affect recovery time including severity of injury, pre-existing neck conditions, stress/anxiety and fear of movement.

If your symptoms are not improving within a few weeks, you may benefit from speaking to a physiotherapist. Physiotherapy may be helpful to assist you in reducing pain and restoring normal movement. Some people will have on-going pain for 6 months or more after injury. In this case you should continue exercises to keep your neck mobile and speak to your GP or Physiotherapist about other strategies that may help you.

Further Information

If you would like to seek the advice of a physiotherapist, there are a number of options within Wiltshire. Please speak to your GP practice about the ways you can be referred or visit <https://wiltshirehealthandcare.nhs.uk/physiotherapy/>

Useful websites:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/whiplash/>

<https://www.activewiltshire.org.uk/>

Here you will find information on improving your activity level and details of what is available in your local area.

<http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/public-health-weight>

Here you will find information about weight management options in your local area.

<https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/public-health-improvement-coaches>

Health Improvement Coaches work on a one to one basis to support behaviour change and improve health. They concentrate on behaviours associated with ill health including unhealthy eating often linked to obesity, stopping, or reducing smoking, sensible drinking, increasing physical activity, building confidence and

motivation to change, and boosting self-esteem. They also signpost and support clients to access other services and activities where appropriate.

Safeguarding

Wiltshire Health and Care (WHC) are committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people and adults at risk of abuse, including victims and survivors of domestic abuse. We expect all WHC staff to share this commitment and promote safeguarding by implementing WHC policies and procedures, act promptly on concerns and share information appropriately.

If you or your carer have any concerns regarding a child or adult's safety, please phone Wiltshire Safeguarding Team on 0300 456 0111 (Adult) or 0300 456 0108 (Child) (9am – 5pm Monday - Friday) or please call 999 if you feel they are in immediate danger.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

If you have any questions, or concerns, suggestions or compliments about our service, please speak to a member of staff.

This information sheet is available in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 0300 123 7797 and whc.pals@nhs.net

Patient and Public Involvement

We value your opinions which will help us to further develop our services.

If you wish to provide feedback or get involved in our patient participation groups, please email the Patient and Public Involvement Officer at ask.wiltshirehealthandcare@nhs.net or telephone 01249 454386.