

Leaflet 3 Management of Whiplash

Following a road traffic accident it is common to experience pain and stiffness round the neck and shoulders. This is because of inflammation in the tissues around the neck, which have been strained during the accident.

If you need a collar, try to restrict its use to the first couple of days only. Take it off regularly, to do the gentle exercises on the next sheet.

Taking painkillers **regularly** is very important at this early stage. If your usual painkillers are not enough, your doctor can advise you.

Other ideas to help reduce the pain:

1. An ice pack, e.g. frozen peas, wrapped in a damp towel and placed on the back of the neck for a maximum of 1 minute. You can repeat this several times a day.
2. Avoid using heat for the first 72 hours but after this you may find heat very useful. You could use a wheat pack or a hot water bottle (make sure it has a cover).
3. Start gentle exercises as soon as possible. This has been shown to help relieve pain and help the tissues to heal better. You may find it more comfortable to start your exercises lying down with your head supported on 1 or 2 pillows.
4. Regular but short periods of rest can be very useful. You may need more pillows than usual. It may be helpful to spend 10 minutes or so relaxing in this position once you have done your exercises.

Exercise

The following exercises should be done 3 or 4 times a day. Move into a gentle stretch only, do not push into pain.

Sitting on a hard-backed chair:

1. Turn head slowly to look over left shoulder and then turn to look over right shoulder.

Repeat 5 times



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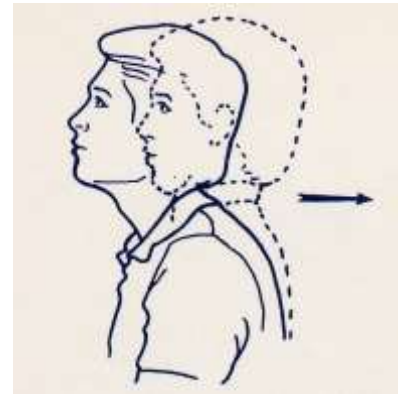
2. Tilt head towards shoulder slowly.
Return to the middle and repeat to
the other side.

Repeat 5 times



3. Sitting with back supported, tuck chin in to
chest as if making a 'double chin'.
Hold for the count of 3 seconds

Repeat 5 times



4. Shrug shoulders up, back and around,
then relax.

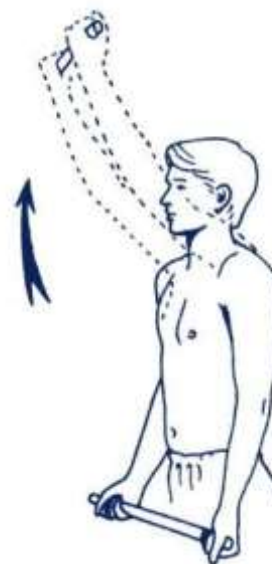
Repeat 5 times



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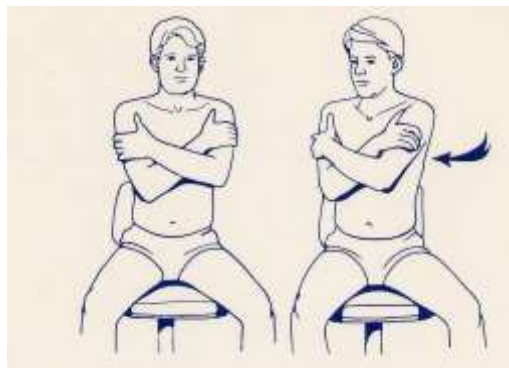
5. Stretch both hands overhead as high as possible.

Repeat 5 times



6. Sitting in a chair with your arms across your chest, turn your trunk to the right and hold for 5 seconds. Then turn to the left.

Repeat 5 times each side



During the first 3 weeks the acute pain should start to settle. Some pain and stiffness may persist for 8 weeks.

You should continue the exercises until full pain free movement is regained.