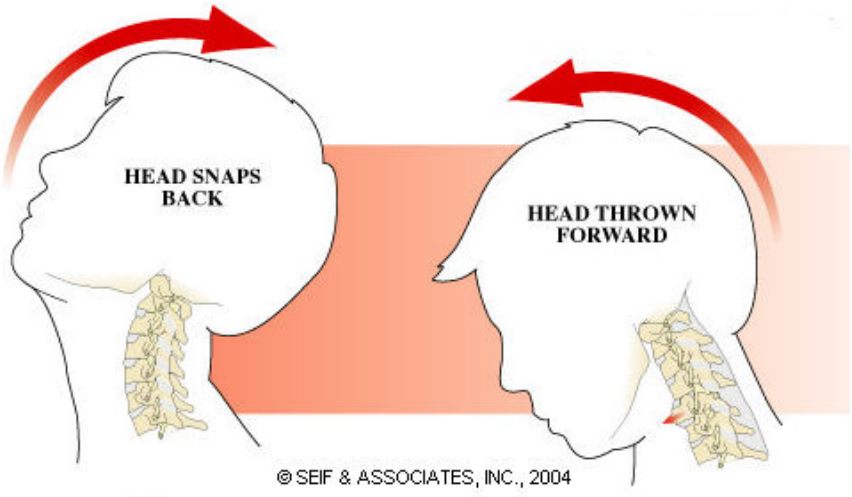
Whiplash

Whiplash is a soft tissue injury to the neck. It is also called neck sprain or neck strain. It is a collection of symptoms that occur after sudden extension and flexion of the neck, as happens in an automobile crash. Whiplash is not due to a bone fracture, dislocation, or a disc that sticks out (*herniated*).



CAUSES

The disorder commonly occurs as the result of an automobile crash.

SYMPTOMS

- Neck pain may be present directly after the injury or may be delayed for several days.
- In addition to neck pain, other symptoms may include:
  - Neck stiffness.
  - Injuries to the muscles and ligaments.
  - Headache.
  - Dizziness.
  - Abnormal sensations such as burning or prickling (*paresthesias*).
  - Shoulder or back pain.
- Some people experience conditions such as:
  - Memory loss.
  - Concentration impairment.
  - Nervousness.
  - Irritability.
  - Sleep disturbances.
  - Fatigue.
  - Depression.

TREATMENT

Treatment for individuals with whiplash may include:

- Pain medications.
- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs.
- Antidepressants.
- Cervical collar.
- Range of motion exercises.
- Physical therapy.
- Supplemental heat application may relieve muscle tension.

LENGTH OF ILLNESS

Generally, the prognosis for individuals with whiplash is excellent. The neck and head pain clears within a few days or weeks. Most patients recover within 3 months after the injury. However, some may continue to have lasting neck pain and headaches.

RESEARCH BEING DONE

The NINDS conducts and supports research on trauma-related disorders such as whiplash. Much of this research focuses on increasing scientific understanding of these disorders and finding ways to prevent and treat them.

Research is continually being done to learn more about this problem.

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