

What is Whiplash?

Whiplash is a **neck injury caused by sudden movement** of the head. This occurs when the neck is subjected to acceleration and deceleration forces, causing the spine to be jolted backwards and forwards, which results in strain or sprain to the soft tissues.

Whiplash is a non-medical term and is most often associated with **road traffic accidents**, but can occur in other situations where the body is jolted unexpectedly.

For full reference and further information please see [NICE Guidelines \(2018\)](#).



What can this look like?

Common symptoms can include **neck pain, stiffness, restricted movement, and headaches**.

Other less common symptoms may include: muscular spasms, deafness, tinnitus, difficulty swallowing (dysphagia), nausea, fatigue, dizziness, pins and needles (paraesthesia), memory loss and joint pain.

The impact of whiplash may result in bony or soft-tissue injuries, which can lead to a variety of clinical manifestations called **Whiplash-Associated Disorders (WAD)**.

For full reference and further information please see [NICE Guidelines \(2018\)](#).



What treatment can be expected?

There is **no single treatment** for whiplash that is widely accepted amongst medical professionals and may depend on the grade of the injury.

Like other strain injuries, it is not unusual for the pain to last for a few months. It can take several hours for symptoms to appear, but will usually get better on its own within 2 to 3 months (NHS, 2019).

Management of whiplash injury may include (see [NICE Guidelines, 2018](#)):

- Self-care information and providing reassurance that symptoms are self-limiting.
- Encouraging early return to usual activities and early mobilisation, and discouraging the use of soft collars.
- Considering referral to physiotherapy treatment or onward referral for diagnostics and/or orthopaedic review if symptoms persist.



Please note: "Medical treatment, including diagnostics and equipment (if relevant to treatment), is VAT exempt. Medical legal reports are VAT applicable as this is not regarded as treatment. Registered psychologists and psychiatrists are able to offer VAT exempt services, but not counsellors or psychotherapists (HMRC, 2021)."

References:

NHS. (2019). Whiplash. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/whiplash/>

NICE. (2018). Neck pain - whiplash injury. <https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/neck-pain-whiplash-injury/#!scenario>