

## Getting the Facts about Whiplash

### Getting the facts about Whiplash: Grades I and II

People injured in car accidents sometimes experience a strain of the neck muscles and surrounding soft tissue, known commonly as whiplash. This injury often occurs when a vehicle is hit from the rear or the side, causing a sharp and sudden movement of the head and neck.

Whiplash may result in tender muscles (Grade I) or limited neck movement (Grade II). This type of injury is usually temporary and most people who experience it make a complete recovery. If you have suffered a whiplash injury, knowing more about the condition can help you participate in your own recovery. This brochure summarizes current scientific research related to Grade I and II whiplash injuries.

### Understanding Whiplash

- Most whiplash injuries are not serious and heal fully.
- Signs of serious neck injury, such as fracture, are usually evident in early assessments.
- Health care professionals trained to treat whiplash are alert for these signs.
- Pain, stiffness and other symptoms of Grades I or II whiplash typically start within the first 2 days after the accident. A later onset of symptoms does not indicate a more serious injury.
- Many people experience no disruption to their normal activities after a whiplash injury.
- Those who do, usually improve after a few days or weeks and return safely to their daily activities.
- Just as the soreness and stiffness of a sprained ankle may linger, a neck strain can also feel achy, stiff or tender for days or weeks. While some patients get better quickly, symptoms can persist over a longer period of time. For most cases of Grades I and II whiplash, these symptoms gradually decrease with a return to activity.

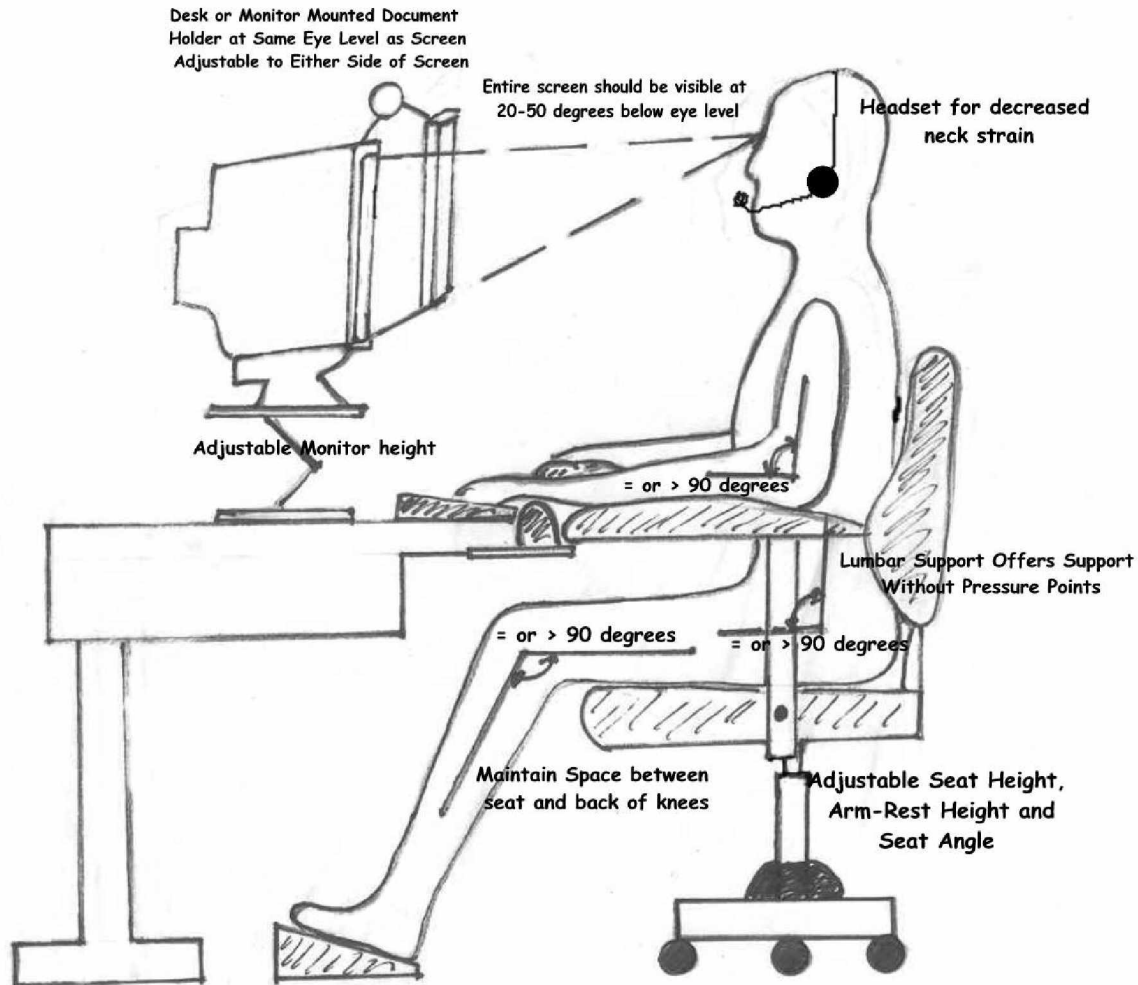
### Daily Activity and Whiplash

- Continuing normal activities is very important to recovery.
- Resting for more than a day or two usually does not help the injury and may instead prolong pain and disability. For whiplash injuries, it appears that "rest makes rusty."
- Injured muscles can get stiff and weak when they're not used. This can add to pain and can delay recovery.
- A return to normal activity may be assisted by **active treatment** and exercises.
- Cervical collars, or "neck braces," prevent motion and may add to stiffness and pain.
- These devices are generally not recommended, as they have shown little or no benefit.
- Returning to activity maintains the health of soft-tissues and keeps them flexible – speeding recovery. Physical exercise also releases body chemicals that help to reduce pain in a natural way.
- To prevent development of chronic pain, it is important to start moving as soon as possible.

### Tips For Return To Activity

- **Avoid sitting in one position for long periods.**
- Periodically stand and stretch.
- Sit at your workstation so that the upper part of your arm rests close to your body, and your back and feet are well supported.

- Adjust the seat when driving so that your elbows and knees are loosely bent.
- When shopping or carrying items, use a cart or hold things close to the body for support.
- Avoid contact sports or strenuous exercise for the first few weeks to prevent further injury.
- Ask your health professional about other sporting or recreational activities.
- Make your sleeping bed comfortable. The pillow should be adjusted to support the neck at a comfortable height.



### Treating Whiplash

- Research indicates that successful whiplash treatment requires patient cooperation and **active** efforts to resume daily activity.
- A treating health care professional will assess your whiplash injuries, and discuss options for treatment and control of pain.
- Although prescription medications are usually unnecessary, temporary use of mild over-the-counter medication may be suggested, in addition to ice or heat.
- Your treating health care professional may recommend appropriate physical treatment.

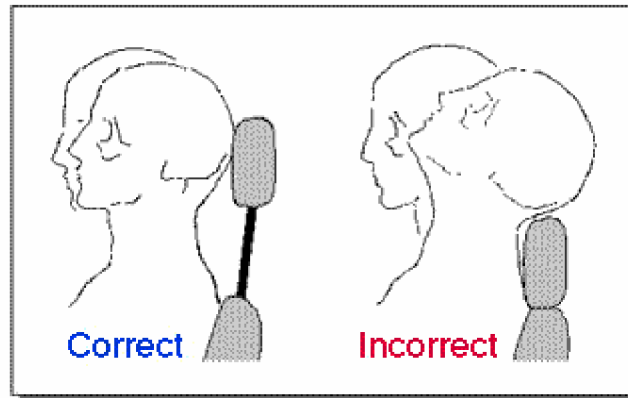
### Avoiding Chronic Pain

- Some whiplash sufferers are reluctant to return to activity, fearing it will make the injury worse. Pain or tenderness may cause them to overestimate the extent of physical damage.
- If your health professional suggests a return to activity, accept the advice and act on it.
- Stay connected with family, friends and co-workers. Social withdrawal can contribute to depression and the development of chronic pain.
- If you are discouraged or depressed about your recovery, talk to your health professional.
- Focus on getting on with your life, rather than on the injury!

### Preventing Another Whiplash Injury

Properly adjusting the height of your car seat head restraint (head rest) will help prevent whiplash injury in an accident. In an ideal adjustment, the top of the head should be in line with the top of the head restraint and there should be no more than 2 to 5 cm between the back of the head and the head restraint.

## Proper Headrest Adjustment



This outline provides general information about whiplash injuries. It does not replace advice from a qualified health care professional who can properly assess a whiplash injury and recommend treatment. The information highlights the latest available scientific research on whiplash and has been endorsed by the following groups:

**Insurance Bureau of Canada (IBC)**  
**Ontario Chiropractic Association (OCA)**  
**Ontario Massage Therapist Association (OMTA)**  
**Ontario Physiotherapy Association (OPA)**  
**Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists (OSOT)**

## Modified Activities of Daily Living

Following injury, you may find that your ability to perform tasks required to go about your daily life are more difficult or complicated than they were before your injury. Injuries may occur in one traumatic event (e.g. car accident), or over the course of a long period of time as an accumulation of many microtraumas (e.g. overuse injuries, postural strain etc.). The point at which the demands upon your body are exceeded by your functional abilities, your injury will begin to impact upon your ability to complete your activities required for daily living. At that point, simple interventions can be utilized to decrease the demands of certain activities until your abilities are restored and you are able to perform those activities once again without aid.

Interventions to reduce demands on the job or at home may be classified in a few groups:

- Ergonomic advice (e.g. workstation analysis and alteration)
- Utilization of assistive devices (e.g. extended broom handles, hands free phone device)
- Conservation of energy strategies:
  - Pacing
  - Planning
  - Goal setting
- Education

### *Ergonomics:*

One set of ideas on ergonomic advice is outlined in the diagram above for workstation idealization. One should of course remember that a static prolonged posture is never a good thing regardless of position, and that strategies should always be implemented to remain active throughout a work day. Many other ergonomic concepts may be implemented for other work situations, sleeping, driving and other activities of daily living, but for the purposes of this document, not all possibilities will be discussed.

### *Assistive Devices:*

Assistive devices will be utilized relative to the requirements of the individual and the disparity between demands and capacities. They may be as simple as a lumbar support for a chair, or a stool to place alternating feet upon while standing for prolonged periods, to canes, reaching tools, cushion grip utensils, and ergonomic mops. Some of these devices are illustrated below.



**Cushion grips  
for utensils**



**Reaching  
Tool**



**Lumbar  
Support**



**Ergonomic  
Mop**

These devices may be utilized to increase one's ability to return to normal activities earlier and allow accelerated independence and return to work which should be one of the primary goals of any rehabilitative process.

### ***Conservation of Energy Strategies***

In the case where functional capacities have been diminished limiting abilities to perform work tasks, work/rest ratios will have to be altered and it may be required to increase the number of activities performed in a given day in order to minimize utilization of certain muscles, ligaments or joints.

For example...If you are required to perform data entry for an 8 hour shift, and this data entry requires a lot of mouse work, you can cut the demands of the hand and forearm performing the mousing in half by learning to mouse with your non-dominant hand and alternating use. If you then introduce an additional unrelated task such as mopping, photocopying, or stocking items requiring lifting, you are further decreasing the demands on that single set of muscles required for mousing with your dominant hand. The overall amount of work performed in a day may actually increase with less demands of any individual group of muscles, ligaments or joints.

Interventions like this example may be required to minimize overuse, and maximize variety at work. This will increase the comfort of the worker while at the same time decreasing psychological effects of monotony. Work/rest schedules should be established in most workplace designs regardless of injuries. Workers should plan time for breaks to get up and move around, or perform prescribed exercises to minimize stress and strain. Work/rest schedules will be specific to the job, as will exercises or break activities, and as such specifics are beyond the scope of this literature. Always remember though that your anatomy has evolved to perform varied activities from running and jumping to lifting and throwing. Any one activity, or passive posture, performed excessively over time may lead to injury.

### ***Education:***

Consider education a life long journey. Always attempt to upgrade your skills and knowledge so that you may continue to be challenged physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. These are strategies to aid you in recovery today, and aim for greater life experiences in the future. If you have questions you should seek answers anywhere you have an opportunity to find them.

**This information has been designed as an outline to topics geared toward your recovery. If you have any questions or comments, you should address your primary health care provider(s) to clarify any details that you are unsure about. Stick to your treatment plans and focus on your own wellness to maximize the benefits of any interventions.**