

# Whiplash

## Severity

- The Québec Task Force (QTF) established four grades of whiplash injury:
  - Grade 1 – neck complaints of pain, stiffness or tenderness only but no physical signs noted by examining physician
  - Grade 2 – neck complaints and the examining physician finds decreased range of movement and point tenderness in the neck
  - Grade 3 – neck complaints with neurological signs such as decreased deep tendon reflexes, weakness, and changes in sensation
  - Grade 4 – neck complaints and fracture, dislocation or injury to the spinal cord

## The problem

- Whiplash refers to a mechanism of injury in which the head suddenly moves backward then forward. This most commonly occurs in automobile accidents, particularly with a rear-end collision.
- This sudden movement through extreme ranges of motion places high amounts of stress through the muscles, ligaments, and discs of the neck and can potentially cause pain and muscle spasm.

## Interesting facts

- Women are more likely to experience whiplash type injury, this is thought to be due to differences in strength between genders.

## What you can expect/look out for

- Neck pain and stiffness
- Headaches, often localized at the base of the skull
- Dizziness, visual disturbances or ringing in the ears
- Often recovery from a whiplash injury occurs over the course of a few weeks; however for some individuals, whiplash injury can become a source of chronic neck pain

## Hints for self-management

- Over the counter pain relievers
- Initially ice can be used to reduce pain and inflammation
- After the first few days heat can be used to relax tight muscles prior to performing range of movement exercises

## Management options

- For more severe cases of whiplash, your physician may order prescription painkillers and/or muscle relaxants.
- Physiotherapy intervention targeted initially at reducing pain, followed by restoring range of movement and strength.
- Massage can help to relax some of the tightened muscles.

## More information

- If the pain spreads down your arms or you experience numbness, tingling, or weakness in your hands or arms, contact your physician.

