

Whiplash: The Unseen Damage

Most of us know somebody that has been in a “fender-bender,” or we’ve been in one ourselves. What most people don’t realize is the potential spinal damage that can occur, even from a minor fender-bender. This damage may not cause pain in the short term, but in the long term can lead to chronic pain and early degenerative arthritis, and other health problems.

A whiplash injury can occur when the head and neck are snapped forward and then back quickly, such as when rear-ended in a car. But any car impact, from any direction, can cause a sudden acceleration-deceleration of the head and neck and result in a whiplash-type injury. Research shows us that a difference of 8 KPH between the speeds of two cars in a collision is enough to cause a whiplash-type injury.

The most common symptoms following a whiplash-type injury are neck pain, shoulder/upper back pain and headaches. Other complaints that may follow include low back pain, dizziness, nausea, fatigue, irritability, difficulty concentrating, difficulty sleeping and nervousness. Often though, there are no immediate symptoms; especially in a slow moving collision. Even though there may not be any immediate symptoms, it is important to realize that damage to the spine may still have occurred.

The normal posture of a neck has a front to back C-shaped curve called the



cervical lordosis. The purpose of this curve is to help spread the weight of the head throughout each of the seven vertebrae in the neck. With a whiplash-type injury the curve may be lost (*alordosis*) or completely reversed (*kypholordosis*), and the head

often hangs forward. A loss or reversal of the normal cervical lordosis



and forward head carriage will cause extra stress to fall on the lower part of the neck, leading to an increased risk of early degenerative arthritis. Dr. Rene Cailliet, M.D. from the University of Southern California has measured the extra force on the spine from these postural changes to add up to 30 lbs of abnormal leverage on the neck, causing pain and loss of range of motion. Dr. Cailliet further describes up to a 30% loss of lung capacity leading to heart and vascular problems, and loss of good bowel function resulting in digestive issues.

How would you know if you've suffered a loss or reversal of your cervical lordosis from a car crash? If you experience pain or any of the other symptoms listed above immediately or within a few days of the crash then there is a good chance that you have experienced postural changes. Unfortunately, symptoms from a whiplash-type injury may not show up until weeks, months or even years after the crash. By this time, the symptoms may be chronic because the postural changes have been present for so long.

Chiropractors are specifically trained to assess car crash victims for postural changes resulting from the crash. If postural changes are found, then the chiropractor is trained to restore the proper cervical C-curve. This can be done through a combination of any or all of: chiropractic adjustments, stretching and strengthening of neck muscles, massage, home exercises and cervical traction.

Recognizing that chiropractors are so effective at treating whiplash-type injuries from car crashes, the Ontario government has enacted legislation that gives *pre-approval* for a chiropractic assessment and up to 7 weeks of treatment, even if pain is not present.

Your treatment is fully covered by your auto insurance company, and your premiums should not be affected.

If you already have chronic pain from an old car crash, you can still be helped. The British Journal of Orthopaedic Medicine reported that “chiropractic is the only proven effective treatment in cases of chronic whiplash.” Whether your crash was recent or in the distant past, see a chiropractor as soon as possible so that you can feel as well as possible, as quickly as possible.