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*"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"*

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## Exercise After an Injury?

In my Chiropractic practice, I noted a substantial difference in how one patient could heal much faster than another could, even if they had similar injuries. I have observed this mostly in the soft tissue (muscles, ligaments, and tendons) and joint injuries suffered by people in motor vehicle accidents. For example, if you take two different people that were of the same sex, relatively the same age and size, both receiving similar injuries in the same accident, why don't they heal in relatively the same time period? If one person remains active while they are healing and the other person does not, the active person will generally get better faster and to a greater degree.

If you are unlucky enough to be in a motor vehicle accident, generally you will suffer from varying degrees of a whiplash. The joints of your neck and upper back will be sprained and swollen. The muscles, tendons, and ligaments will be stretched and microscopic tears will likely occur. If the accident was serious, fractures should be ruled out by taking X-rays. Then, a good physical examination by your Medical Doctor or Chiropractor should be completed. Once this is done, you should rest for a period of time until the acute phase of the injuries have passed (the swelling starts to decrease, the severe muscle spasms begin to subside, and the person is able to move adequately).

As soon as you feel good enough, you should get moving. I realize this goes against the old train of thought that if your neck or back hurts, don't move it. Years ago, when someone suffered a whiplash, they were told to wear a cervical collar for six weeks to immobilize the neck. More recent research has shown that this may actually prolong the pain and suffering. New studies are showing that the muscles, ligaments, and joints will mostly heal on their own. However, if you stretch and maintain the strength of these areas in a controlled and supervised manner, the healing will occur faster and to a greater extent.

This is no different than rehabilitating a knee after surgery. If a cast were simply put on the knee to immobilize it for six weeks, the muscles would shrink and become weak. The knee joint itself would lose its full movement and remain very stiff. To prevent this, the person must maintain the strength and flexibility of

the leg muscles and keep the knee joint moving in a controlled manner so the joint doesn't stiffen. In the case of a whiplash, the person must do the same. They have to maintain the strength and flexibility of the neck and back, while keeping the joints of the spine moving so they don't stiffen. In my office, we are able to improve and maintain the movement in the joints by doing gentle Chiropractic manipulation or mobilization. To assist the soft tissues in healing, we prefer to enter our patients into a physical rehabilitation program at either of the fitness centers in the community. We have staff that shows our patients how to gently exercise the injured areas to promote the healing process. The patient must learn how to exercise to the pain and not into the pain. If done incorrectly, the suffering may get worse. Their supervised program is either part or full time for generally six weeks.

Once the injured areas are relatively pain free and have a good range of motion, the person can increase the intensity of their exercise without risk of re-injuring them. We encourage all of the patients to continue maintaining this higher level of activity and to have the joints of the spine checked every couple weeks. The healing process extends well beyond the time when the pain disappears. Scar tissue that formed in and around the injured areas must be dissolved by the body and replaced with normal tissue. Previously injured areas will remain more vulnerable to flare-ups for quite some time.

In closing, if you get a whiplash, see your Medical Doctor and Chiropractor. Then, once you are good enough, get into a supervised exercise program so that you can help your body heal as fast and as completely as possible.