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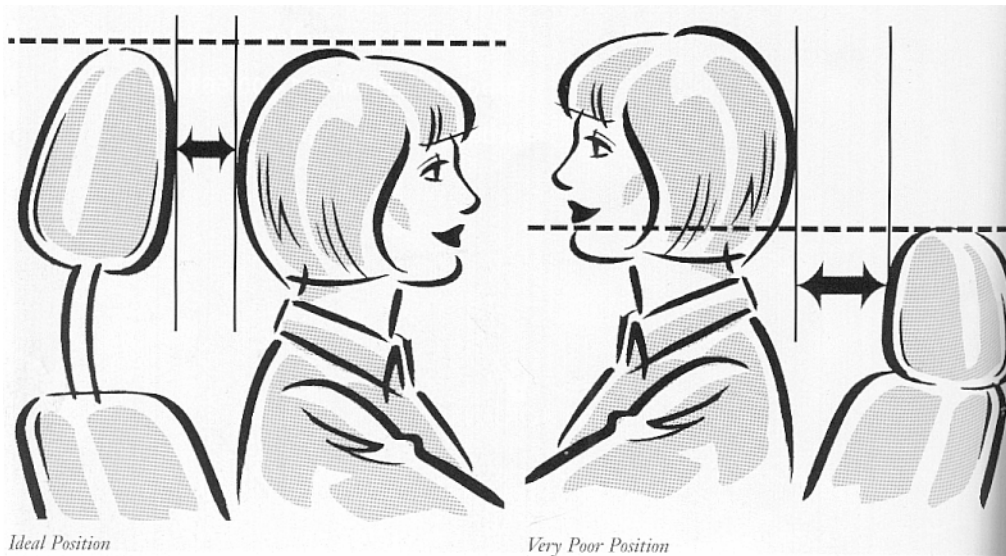
"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"

Adjust Your Headrest Properly to Prevent Whiplash

Chiropractors see patients with muscle, nerve, and joint injuries on a daily basis. But what exactly is the cause of many of these injuries? As you may have guessed, in many cases, it's motor vehicle accidents. With more than 200,000 auto accident-related injuries each year in Canada, that is a lot of lives disrupted by something so preventable.

Chiropractors have an excellent opportunity to make a difference in these people's lives. Not just by fixing them once the accident has occurred, but also by educating our patients about how to prevent or lessen the extent of the injury before it even happens. How is this possible? By having the headrest of your car seat adjusted properly, the risk of whiplash-related injuries can be reduced by 40%. Unfortunately, many drivers don't know much about headrests and they simply hop into their cars without a second thought as to what is behind them –literally.

By actually videotaping passing motorists and how their headrests were adjusted, studies have shown that over half (53%) of all drivers had their headrests adjusted in an improper position. These poorly adjusted headrests will provide virtually no protection in a rear-end collision. In fact, they may even increase the "whip-like" forces, further damaging the neck soft tissues and spine.



What exactly is a good headrest position? There are actually two measurements – vertical, and horizontal. This simply means how high your headrest is and how far it is positioned from the back of your head. In regards to the headrest height, the top of the headrest should be level with the area between the top of your ear and the top of your head. If the headrest is too low and you are rear-ended, your head will actually “ramp” backwards over the top of it. This would allow your head to “whip” backward even further while your neck is held in place, increasing the severity of the whiplash. When it comes to how far your head should be from the headrest, this distance should not be more than two to four inches. The greater this distance is over the four inches, the further your head can “whip” backward before abutting the padded headrest. This will also increase the severity of the whiplash injury.

If you are unfortunate enough to have experienced a moderate to severe whiplash, there will be microscopic, but potentially very painful, damage to the muscles, ligaments, tendons, nerves, and joints. This can leave you with neck pain, headaches, reduced mobility, dizziness, trouble swallowing, memory loss, and even deafness. In our office, we commonly and successfully treat many of these symptoms. By doing gentle “adjustments” or mobilization to the joints in your neck, their movement or mobility can be restored. Only by maintaining this movement can your joints heal naturally and completely. Various soft tissue techniques can also be used to reduce the muscle spasm and restore the muscle flexibility. Then, you would be given a series of neck stretches and exercises to restore and maintain the muscle strength and flexibility. Depending on the extent of pre-existing arthritis, the severity of the whiplash, and the effort you make to get better, the process of healing can take weeks to months. You also have to keep in mind that your neck is not completely healed when the pain diminishes or when your medication runs out. Long after the serious symptoms have diminished, your neck is still healing at a microscopic level.

As I always preach, the best treatment for any injury is preventing it from happening in the first place. Taking that extra minute to properly adjust your headrest may mean the difference between walking away from an accident or living with the pain and disruption of your life that whiplash so commonly causes.