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

Damaging the Nerves in Your Neck

Although the wet weather has put a damper on many summer activities, the people of the B.C. interior still manage to get out and enjoy our great outdoors. This is often done while on horseback, riding a "quad", or even on a mountain bike. However, with these activities there are always accidents. Depending on the severity, these people often show up in the office of a Chiropractor.

A common mechanism of injury is when a person is thrown forwards off a spooked horse or an out of control bike. Their shoulder then hits the ground or a tree and stops suddenly while the head and the trunk continue to move. This forcibly stretches the area between the neck and shoulder. There are a group of eight nerves that exit from the spine of the neck. They intertwine with each other to form what is called the "brachial plexus". They pass behind your collarbone, under your chest muscles, through your armpit, and down the arm as far as the hand. These are the same nerves that can become compressed while you sleep in awkward positions, making your arms or hands numb. They control all the muscles and skin sensation of the hand and arm. When the neck and one shoulder are forcibly stretched away from each other, these nerves can become stretched. This type of force on a nerve can damage it. How much of the arm that will be affected depends on how many and which of the nerves were injured. Unfortunately, nerves have a poor blood supply and are notorious for not healing quickly. In some cases, a nerve may never return to its normal function. In severe cases, the nerves can be torn off where they exit the spine and the arm may be left partially paralyzed or numb forever.

Treatment of the severe cases may require surgery. The more mild ones will take longer than you may think to heal. Initially, the neck and shoulder should be immobilized. Once the inflammation around the nerves has decreased, conservative treatment can be given.

It is difficult to consciously prevent this type of injury from occurring. You can only try to avoid situations where you may be thrown from your "mount". If you have a fall similar to one described above and experience even mild numbness in your hand or arm, have it checked out by your Chiropractor. In a severe case, a referral to another health care practitioner may also be required.