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

Understanding Whiplash

It is likely that everyone who reads this article knows someone directly or indirectly that has suffered from whiplash. Years ago, very little was known about this injury. Due to the extensive costs of treating it, much more research is now being done. I have highlighted some interesting facts that have arisen from these studies.

- 1) The most common cause of whiplash is a motor vehicle accident, but it can easily occur in situations that do not involve motor vehicles.
- 2) The term "whiplash" is typically used in reference to rear-end collisions that cause rapid backward/forward movement of the head. However, a whiplash type injury can occur in many different potential types of accidents such as head-on and side-impact collisions.
- 3) Of significant importance is also the position of the person in the car. If the person had their seat reclined to have a nap or they were slouched forward to read a map, the severity and location of the neck injury could be quite different. If the person had their neck turned forty-five degrees one way, the injury will generally be much worse.
- 4) It also makes a difference if the person could see the impact coming. The muscles of the neck cannot contract fast enough to brace against the forces of being hit unless the person can see the oncoming car ahead of time. If the muscles are relaxed when the impact occurs, the neck will be stretched further and more damage may occur.
- 5) If the headrest of the seat is too far from the head, it cannot stop the head from snapping backwards and the injury will be worse. The greater the distance between the head and the headrest, the greater the potential damage to the neck.
- 6) The severity of whiplash can vary significantly. In mild cases, the muscles are simply "strained" or pulled. Often, a person will contract their neck muscles in an attempt to resist the forces of the impact. However, these muscles are not nearly strong enough to withstand the forces and they become injured. In more traumatic cases, the muscles are "strained", the joints are "sprained", and the nerves are irritated or damaged. This means that not only are the muscles injured, but the joints are either jammed or stretched beyond

their normal ranges of motion as well. It is also not uncommon for the ligaments and intervertebral disks that hold the bones together to become damaged as well. In very severe cases, fractures of the vertebrae could even occur.

Regardless of the severity of the whiplash, the joints will eventually need treatment to restore their normal movement. The sooner this can be done safely, the faster the injured joints will heal. If left untreated, the effected joints will likely develop arthritis earlier than they should normally. I see this in many patients who see me for neck complaints a year or two after an accident. They did nothing and thought it would “just go away”. The injured muscles will also need regular stretching and strengthening in order to heal properly.

If you have experienced a whiplash in the recent past or perhaps up to years earlier, see your chiropractor and take the necessary steps to allow your neck to heal completely and naturally before it is too late.