Whiplash

Whiplash is not really a disease like arthritis of high blood pressure but a description of how an injury occurred. When a person suffers a whiplash injury he or she is telling you that being thrown around in a certain manner hurt their spine, usually their neck.

**WHIPLASH MECHANISM**

Whiplash usually occurs when the head and neck are unexpectedly or suddenly thrown very quickly in one direction and then rebound in the opposite direction. You might say the head is “whipped around” on the neck.

In an auto rear-end injury, the first thing that occurs is the body is thrown forwards but the head is thrown backwards and the neck is hyper-extended. A whiplash can also result from the sudden stopping of a car where the body remains fairly in place but the head and neck are thrown forwards into hyper-flexion.

In almost all whiplash type injuries, there is a certain amount of hyper-flexion and hyperextension. That is because the muscles react to the initial injury by pulling or rebounding in the opposite direction. The rebound can and often does cause injury. (Occasionally a whiplash injury can result from side to side motion of the neck also called left and right lateral hyper-flexion).

There is more to whiplash than hyper-flexion and hyper-extension. Usually the head is rotated a slight bit, either to the right or the left when an accident occurs and this complicates the effects of the injury.

**DEGREES OF WHIPLASH**

All whiplash injuries are a little different because there are so many things that change from accident to accident: how the driver was facing, his/her age, amount of warning or the state of preparedness, the health of their bones, muscles, ligaments and discs, the direction of the impact and the speeds involved. Unfortunately wearing a seatbelt has little effect on whiplash injury protection. Headrests, however, which are fairly standard these days, do offer some protection in the hyperextension aspect of the injury.

A whiplash type injury doesn’t only occur in automobile accidents. Whiplash injuries may occur as a result of sudden forces to the body as in contact sports like football or soccer and falls, direct traumas to the skull or even a sudden sneeze.
SPINAL CORD DAMAGE

Because of these factors, whiplash symptoms may be quite different from person to person; they can range from barely noticeable stiffness to death.

A worst case scenario occurs in a small minority of the cases where there is actual bone fracture and spinal cord damage. The most severe spinal cord damage can cause paralysis and death. However, although in most cases of cord damage there may be dramatic symptoms: inability to move arms and legs, numbness of trunk and extremities and even loss of bladder control—these symptoms are quite temporary and normal body function and control quickly return.

IN MOST CASES

In the vast majority of whiplash injuries, the damage is to the neck’s ligaments, tendons, muscles and vertebral alignment. When the vertebrae are misaligned, the nerves that travel between them may be impinged or “pinched”. This may also happen to the spinal cord in varying degrees causing a vertebral subluxation. Many authorities feel that vertebral subluxations are the main problem of most whiplash injuries.

WHIPLASH SYMPTOMS

Whiplash symptoms may start as neck soreness of stiffness, perhaps accompanied by a headache immediately or within a few hours of the accident. Along with these symptoms there may be pain and/or numbness, tingling or a pins-and-needles feeling between the shoulder blades, arm and hand.

Some people may experience ear ringing, dizziness, or even hearing loss. Sometimes the eyes can be affected and there may be pain behind the eyeballs, blurred vision, sensitivity to light, or other visual symptoms. Occasionally, there may be tearing or running of the nose.

CONCUSSION

A concussion occurs when the brain is struck against the skull. A violent shaking of the head may cause a concussion, even if the head isn’t struck against the car. There may be headache, restlessness, irritability, insomnia, moodiness, depression and emotional “jitters” that may last for hours of days after the accident.

MEDICAL CARE?

An individual who has been in an accident should first make sure that there is no life threatening emergency—no broken bones, torn blood vessels or hemorrhage, loss of blood electrolytes, internal organ damage, serious contusions or abrasions, shock and the like. This is the specialty of the medical profession, which does its best work when dealing with trauma or accidental injury. After the patient is out of immediate danger, when it is safe to do so, their spine desperately needs to be checked for life threatening subluxations or spinal nerve stress. It must be emphasized that chiropractors are not against rational, logical medical care.
In most whiplash accidents, however, medical care falls short. Too often however, many people who have experienced a whiplash injury do little more than live on pain killers, muscle relaxants and various therapies including surgery. They need to know that in many cases a visit to the chiropractor may totally eliminate the problem safely, quickly and without drugs or surgery.

**CHIROPRACTIC CARE FOR WHIPLASH VICTIMS**

Any kind of accident of trauma may (and usually does) cause spinal subluxations. In other words, the vertebrae are out of their proper alignment and are “pinching” or more accurately, “impinging” or interfering with nerves. Often this is a painless condition but in whiplash type injuries to the neck, the vertebral misalignments, because of the neck anatomy, are often quite painful. No amount of pain killers, muscle relaxers, sedatives, or physical therapy can re-align the vertebrae and relieve the nervous system and skeletal system from pressure. What is needed is the chiropractic art: the spinal adjustment, which realigns the spinal column safely and easily.

**OLD WHIPLASH?**

Some people may have had a whiplash in the past but now feel pretty good; do they need to see a chiropractor? YES! The M.D.s may have sent the person home after they took lots of X-rays and found nothing broken; yet the spine may still be structurally unsound. Many times people develop arthritis and disc problems years after the accident and the legal settlements because they never got

A chiropractor to check and adjust their spine. Without structural integrity the spine will not heal properly. It may become symptom free but will ultimately have problems.

**VERTEBRAL SUBLUXATION**

A whiplash injury is a dramatic example of one type of vertebral subluxation—the kind produced by accident or trauma or great stress that occurs suddenly. Subluxations may be also caused by motional stresses and tensions that slowly build up day by day—this is called micro-trauma. Examples of other forms of micro-trauma poor posture, bad sleeping positions, weak muscles and poor diet. Even extensive dental work may cause neck or skull misalignments. A chiropractic examination often includes a discussion of your personal habits and any injuries, falls accidents or situations which may contribute to subluxations.

Please remember however, the role of the chiropractor is to permit the body to function with a healthy spinal column. But if you’ve been involved in a whiplash-type accident see your doctor of chiropractic as soon as possible to make sure you heal as completely as possible.