

Whiplash

The car comes out of nowhere, and then, the impact metal crushing quickly, easily, like tinfoil wadding up in the palm of a hand. In a millisecond, or so it seems, you life is changed-permanently, if you are one of the unfortunate ones, temporarily if you are lucky.

In this country every year, accidents involving motor vehicles account for over three million deaths or injuries, and the causes are morbidly familiar: alcohol, mechanical failure, road conditions, sleepiness. Many of the serious accidents leave behind individual legacies of permanent physical damage.

But there is an increasing range of injury due to “minor” traffic accidents that impair, disable and generally bring undeserved pain to millions of Americans. Even if many of these “minor injuries” do not require hospitalization, they do require immediate attention, and frequently, repeated treatments of one kind or another.

No one enjoys the prospect of preparing for such unpleasant eventualities. However, you will cope more easily with the urgency of an accident situation if you understand the types of injuries commonly sustained and the role your Doctor of Chiropractic plays in healing the whole person.

COMMON MINOR INJURIES

Auto accidents can be described as either low-velocity (below 10 mph) or high-velocity (above 10 mph). In low-velocity accidents, the victim’s body is thrown backward and forward in a rapid progression of acceleration and deceleration. Since it is unusual at this speed for the victim to experience a second impact inside the vehicle (such as hitting the dashboard), the injuries usually result from the rapid movement of the body during a crash. Common low-velocity injuries include muscle strain, seat belt bruises, or traumatic brain injury (shaken brain syndrome). The onset of symptoms is often delayed with these injuries so that at the time of the accident the victim may not immediately realize an injury has occurred. Within 12 to 36 hours after the impact, however the victim will begin to recognize pain and stiffness of the injured areas.

High velocity collisions normally result in more serious injury because the victim experiences a second impact, hitting an object in the vehicle such as the dashboard, steering wheel, or even the windshield. Common injuries include shoulder, head or knee hematomas, wrist fractures, neck sprain, concussion, and contusions. There is no question that these victims immediately know where and how badly they are injured.

TRAUMATIC CERVICAL SYNDROME

Traumatic cervical syndrome, or whiplash, is one of the most common auto accident injuries. Whiplash happens when the neck is forced through a series of movements at a rate faster than the bones, muscles, and ligaments can accommodate. The crash forces the head forward slightly then backward violently, forward to recoil (though less forcefully), and finally to a neutral, stationary position. Injury to the neck occurs in both the backward movement, in which the neck is hyperextended, and in the forward flexion, when the chin hits the chest. Types of injuries that might occur include torn muscles and ligaments, nerve inflammation, and vertebral misalignment. Symptoms like swelling and/or tenderness in the neck, sore throat and/or loss of voice, trouble swallowing, jaw problems, shoulder and back pain, vomiting, and flashing lights in the visual field are common with these injuries.

As with other minor accident injuries, a person suffering from whiplash may not realize the extent of injury for a few days. The victim will then notice pain during movement of the neck as well as loss of motion or stiffness when the head is tipped back. Other symptoms of whiplash include light-headedness or dizziness, difficulty concentrating, short-term memory loss, insomnia, painful tingling sensations, weakness in the muscles of the neck and shoulder, visual disturbances or blurred vision, and ringing in the ears.

It would not be surprising for the victim to also experience fatigue and irritability. The trauma of the event itself, added to pain and disability, creates stress that may linger even into the stages of treatment and recovery.

CONTACT YOUR CHIROPRACTOR

Understanding what to do when an accident happens and what types of injuries can occur may save you time, money, and long-term medical care, but a prompt physical examination is the best advice. Immediately see your Doctor of Chiropractic who will determine the extent of any injuries, and prescribe a treatment regimen to speed the healing process.

What can you expect when you go to the chiropractor’s office? The physical exam will include an assessment of your vital signs, range of motion, equilibrium, coordination and posture. If the chiropractor has no previous health records, you will need to complete a medical history to put your current condition in proper perspective. In some cases, diagnostic tests may be required, and may include a neuro-orthopedic exam, a chiropractic spinal exam and vascular and nerve condition tests. An x-ray of the cervical area

would not be unusual. To ensure that no damage was done to the spinal cord, your doctor may also request an MRI, a more sophisticated radiographic imaging. The exam may seem comprehensive, but it's important to remember that the physical exam may be your only basis for legal or medical claims.

After the exam has been completed, test results examined, and prognosis determined, treatment could proceed. Your recovery will be a joint effort between you and your Doctor of Chiropractic.

In the chiropractic office you can expect a variety of treatment methods, including spinal manipulation or adjustment, electrotherapy, ultrasound, graded exercises, therapeutic muscle massage, use of a cervical collar or traction, or additional therapies.

What you can do at home can be summarized in an easy to remember acronym: RICE

REST – get plenty of it. Your system has been through a trauma, however slight, and your body needs time to assimilate the shock as well as to adapt to the “new conditions” of pain, disability, and other symptoms.

ICE – the injured area to reduce swelling. The general rule is to apply ice for twenty minutes, then take one hour off before applying ice again. This can be done up to 48 hours. Never apply ice to bare skin.

COMPRESSION – will help reduce swelling, provide support, and can be achieved by wrapping the injured area with an elastic bandage. Consult with your doctor about correct wrapping procedures.

ELEVATE – limbs or reduce the weight-bearing functions of injured areas.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

The random and haphazard nature of auto accidents puts everyone who drives or rides in a car in jeopardy. Even so, there are few good habits that you can practice to reduce your risk of accident or injury.

WEAR A SEATBELT AT ALL TIMES. They save lives.

Air bags will further reduce your risk of serious injury.

DRIVE DEFENSIVELY. Comply with traffic laws and keep an eye on other drivers. Slow down and expect the unexpected at intersections. Be alert to impaired drivers. If you should spot an impaired driver: 1) maintain a safe distance and do not attempt to pass, 2) move to the shoulder and stop to allow the car to pass, 3) get the license plate number and report the car to police.

MAINTAIN CHIROPRACTIC HEALTHCARE. Keeping in top physical shape is an excellent way to protect the body against life's mishaps. Proper nutrition, exercise, and regular chiropractic care form the fibers of a protective net of good health. It is the protective net that will catch you and cushion the blows should the unexpected happen.

SYMPTOMS OF WHIPLASH

☞☞ Headache (on one or both sides)

☞☞ Head and neck pain

☞☞ Tension

☞☞ Muscle Spasm

☞☞ Stiff neck

☞☞ Restriction of motion

☞☞ Blackouts

☞☞ Fatigue

☞☞ Extreme nervousness

☞☞ Mental dullness

☞☞ Muscle swelling

☞☞ Heaviness of head, neck and shoulders

☞☞ Light blindness

☞☞ Loss of balance

☞☞ Equilibrium problems

☞☞ Loss of hearing

☞☞ Pinched nerves

☞☞ Slipped discs

☞☞ Muscle tearing

☞☞ Neuralgia

☞☞ Ringing in the ears

☞☞ Nausea

☞☞ Gastro-intestinal symptoms

☞☞ Lightheadedness

☞☞ Shortness of breath

☞☞ Low back pains

☞☞ Pain between the shoulders

☞☞ Cold hands and feet

☞☞ Excessive sweating

☞☞ Numbness of arms, hands, shoulders

☞☞ Loss of normal spinal contours

☞☞ Increased reaction to drugs

☞☞ Anxiety

☞☞ Irritability

☞☞ Poor memory

☞☞ Inability to concentrate

☞☞ Depression

☞☞ Fractures

☞☞ Dislocations

☞☞ Palpitation

☞☞ Eye strain

☞☞ Tremors

☞☞ Pallor

☞☞ Insomnia

☞☞ Muscle atrophy

☞☞ Rapid heartbeat