

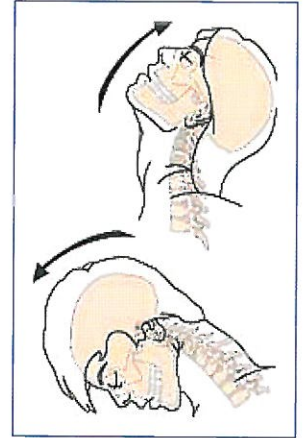
## Whiplash is the Most Common Car Crash Injury....

By Dr. Gilles Beaumont

**What exactly is Whiplash?** As indicated in the previous article, “whiplash” is the most common injury in a motor vehicle crash. Whiplash is an injury to the neck caused by a sudden “whipping” movement of the head and neck. Yet the term whiplash is really not a medical term. Whiplash is medically referred to as neck strain (a strain is a muscle or tendon injury) or neck sprain (a sprain is a ligament injury). Whiplash may also be referred to as a hyperextension-hyperflexion injury by doctors and healthcare personnel. When the head is suddenly jolted forward or backward, the muscles in the neck do not have time to react and the neck is extended beyond its normal range of motion (hyperextension). This type of injury is most common in rear-end crashes, the most common car crash scenario. But whiplash can also occur in side impact crashes when the head is hyper-flexed to the left or right. The force may also be too great for the muscles in the neck to be able to hold the neck within a safe range of motion. This hyperextension of the neck causes muscles and/or ligaments that support the neck to become overstretched or torn. In some cases, the discs and facet joints (spinal joints) and nerve roots may also be damaged. Inflammation of soft tissues may also result in compression of nerve roots. In severe cases, there may even be fractures, such as compression fractures to the vertebra, or dislocations. Whiplash injuries are usually not serious (life-threatening) yet they can cause severe pain and discomfort. The severity of the injuries, the symptoms, and recovery time from whiplash varies significantly. Mild whiplash injuries often heal within three to six weeks, moderate whiplash injuries within eight to sixteen weeks. A severe whiplash injury may take several months to heal. The good news is most people, with proper care and treatment, recover fully from whiplash injuries but occasionally some people develop long-term problems.

### What are the Symptoms of Whiplash and When Should a Victim Seek Care?

The first and primary symptom of whiplash is neck pain, which may include burning, prickling or tingling (from muscle tears) as well as general soreness and/or stiffness. These symptoms usually are noticeably within two hours to two days after the crash. The majority of whiplash victims also report muscle tension type headaches and many also experience pain radiating from the neck area into the shoulder blades and down the back. Other associated symptoms include, 1) blurred vision, 2) dizziness, 3) nausea, 4) ringing in the ears, 5) pain radiating into the arms and legs, 6) vertigo, and 7) pain in the jaw or face. Even if the symptoms are mild, always seek a proper diagnosis from a health care professional knowledgeable in the treatment of motor vehicle injuries. The diagnosis may be based upon the doctor’s findings alone, or an MRI or CT may be taken to see the extent of the soft tissue injury. In most situations X-rays will be taken to rule out fractures or dislocations and to determine if vertebral alignment has been effected by the hyperextension and/or hyperflexion mechanism of the whiplash injury. If the examination findings suggest a more serious injury or the need for more extensive evaluation or testing, your chiropractor will make the appropriate referral to another health care specialist. In addition, auto accidents that result in whiplash may also result in other injuries such as chest injuries, back injuries, internal injuries, etc. that should be treated.



*Whiplash is often referred to as a hyperextension-hyperflexion injury, but this diagram shows why the term “whiplash” is commonly used.*

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*Delaying care for a whiplash injury can make the recovery period longer and more costly.*

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