

Whiplash

Healing a Pain in the Neck

Hope Bentley

Getting rear-ended in traffic. Face-planting at the bottom of a ski slope. Tumbling over the handlebars on your bike. Whiplash comes in many forms and can become a long-term problem if not treated correctly. Fortunately, massage and bodywork can address the ache and discomfort that come with whiplash and prevent chronic pain down the road.

Understanding Whiplash

The term "whiplash" came into use in 1928. Doctors will sometimes use "hyperextension injury," to describe it, but "whiplash" is a more visceral account of what has happened to the victim's

Car accidents are the most common causes of whiplash. The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons reported that about 20 percent of people who have been in rear-end collisions later report whiplash symptoms. Whether front to back or side to side, whiplash can affect muscles all the way into the victim's back and arms. The most serious form of whiplash compresses nerves in the neck and cause multiple sprains of the ligaments.

The good news is, serious hyperextension injuries are in the minority, as whiplash usually comes in the less serious version of the injury. "Fortunately, about 95 percent of the time whiplash tends to be more



Whiplash injuries can lead to headache as well as neck, jaw, and back pain.

neck. The neck itself has made a whip-like motion bending first towards and then away from the point of impact. As the head moves rapidly in one direction, the muscles in the neck receive the message to contract. The momentum of the head can cause strain or sprain to the muscles and ligaments in the neck as the head reaches the end of its movement.

superficial damage, like slight muscle strains and tears," says Ben Benjamin, Ph.D., a massage therapist who holds a doctorate in education and sports medicine. But whether the pain is minor soreness or serious discomfort, massage can provide relief and prevent chronic problems in the long run.

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*Forget not that
the earth
delights to feel
your bare feet
and the winds
long to play
with your hair.*

-Kahlil Gibran

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Whiplash Symptoms

The symptoms of whiplash include neck pain and stiffness, headaches, pain in the shoulder or between the shoulder blades (sometimes called "coat hanger pain"), low back pain, and pain or numbness in the arms or extremities.

Often people who suffer whiplash do not feel the effects until two or three days after the injury-causing incident. Benjamin explains that this delayed onset is because it takes time for scar tissue to manifest in the sprained or strained muscles and ligaments. And because scar tissue is more adhesive than regular tissue, people experience it as stiffness in the injured areas.

Whiplash affects primarily the neck, but victims shouldn't ignore the rest of the body. This injury can pull the long muscles on either side of the spine, which reach all the way to the tailbone and can cause discomfort along the way. Discomfort or stiffness in the chest and arms can also be due to whiplash. And headaches may be the result of slowed circulation to the head caused by the swelling in the injury.

Massage Can Help

Any massage that causes a general relaxation of the client's muscles can help relieve muscular pain in common types of whiplash injuries. In addition, massage increases the amount of oxygen that reaches the healing tissues and opens those tissues so they can receive oxygen and nutrients, thus speeding the healing process.

In addition to relaxation massage, specific bodywork methods ease acute whiplash discomfort and help prevent chronic fallout. For example, myofascial approaches restore fluidity to the fascia--normally a slippery tissue that surrounds all the moving parts inside the body--allowing freer movement of muscles and ligaments. Friction-based massage helps break up scar tissue and relieve stiffness. Trigger point therapy works by releasing tension held in tight knots of muscle. And any type of bodywork that stimulates circulation helps ease and prevent headaches.

Finally, the incident that caused the whiplash in the first place, (a car wreck, for instance) can be traumatic. Massage

helps relax a client's psyche as well as their muscles, helping her or him work through the emotional issues induced by the accident.

Because the neck is such a delicate part of the body, it is important to proceed with caution. Benjamin advises waiting a few days after the accident to seek treatment. This allows the initial scar tissue to knit, which is an important part of the healing process. The initial treatment should be extremely gentle, and if there is a chance of a fracture, a concussion, any disc problem or other serious injury, the client should make sure to see a physician first.

Let the Healing Begin

It used to be that physicians would immobilize whiplash injuries with a cervical collar, but now health care professionals advise a more temperate course for their patients.

"I recommend gentle neck movement within your range of motion while lying on a pillow," says Benjamin. Movement may help prolong the benefits of the massage by continuing to circulate blood, oxygen, and nutrients through the healing tissue. "Heat or cold, whichever feels better, can also help," says Benjamin. "Soaking in a hot bath can also be beneficial." Limiting physical activity for a few days and getting plenty of rest in the wake of a whiplash injury is also a good idea.

Whiplash is traumatic and should be addressed soon after the injury to avoid any chronic problems. If you or someone you love is suffering from the repercussions of whiplash, consider a bodywork session to ease the discomfort. Massage can help lessen muscle pain, induce relaxation, and ease the trauma often associated with whiplash. You'll be back to your old self in no time.



Bodywork has an arsenal of methods to treat whiplash injuries for a full recovery.

Massage for Your Teenager?

Bodywork Can Ease Adolescent Angst

While teens may be less likely than their parents to go to a massage therapist, there are plenty of reasons why this age group should be encouraged to give it a try. The benefits of massage are well documented, among them relief of muscle tension, lowered stress hormones, increased sense of relaxation, improved immune function, and even a heightened ability to concentrate, according to studies conducted by the Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami School of Medicine. But for teenagers, there's an additional payback.

The teenage body is in the midst of transformation -- exponential growth and development in a rapid period of time. On the physical side, teens may be at increased risk for aches, pains, and injury. Many teens strain their bodies with competitive sports, get erratic sleep, and consume a less-than-optimal diet. Massage can help muscles recover from overuse, and help balance the body and maintain that stability.

Perhaps even more crucial, teen massage can help improve body image and sleep patterns, and contribute to decreased depression, anxiety, and stress. This keeps a teen connected to her body, even as it morphs in confounding ways. "Many teens are self-conscious, and not happy with their bodies," says Eeris Kallil, massage therapist and shiatsu instructor at the Boulder College of Massage Therapy, in Colorado. "Massage can help teens stay grounded." Bodywork has also been reported to help mediate eating disorders, a growing concern among teens.

Another potential plus: A beneficial, therapeutic relationship can develop between bodyworkers and teenagers during the years when adolescents need adult confidantes, but keep parents at a distance. The practitioner can become a supportive, trusted adult in a teen's life. And the session itself, according to Kallil, can be a way to deal with all the physical and emotional turmoil of this tender age.



Massage eases teen depression and anxiety.

Hot or Cold for Injuries?

How to Know Which is Best for You

Art Riggs

We all know that treating an injury immediately after it happens can help minimize the pain and damage as well as facilitate recovery. But after rolling your ankle in a soccer game, or hurting your back when lifting your toddler, or tweaking your knee when stepping out of your car, what's best? Should you ice it to try to control inflammation, or would heat be better to promote circulation?

While it's difficult to establish a fail-safe rule for when to apply ice or heat, the general directive is to use ice for the first forty-eight to seventy-two hours after an acute injury and then switch to heat.

It Depends

The reality is that many conditions are not necessarily the result of a specific

injury. I call these conditions "recurrent acute" and find them by far the most common: sciatica that occurs when you drive a car; a back that flare up every time you garden; or tennis elbow from intense computer work. In these cases, consistent and frequent applications of ice may prove very helpful over long periods of time, particularly immediately after experiencing the event that causes problems.

Conversely, back or other muscle spasms caused by overexertion rather than injury may benefit greatly from heat immediately upon the onset of symptoms or immediately after exercise in order to relax the muscles and increase circulation. Also, muscle belly pain not resulting from acute and

serious trauma generally responds well to heat, which can break the spasms and release the strain. On the other hand, nerve and tendon pain--regardless of the duration of symptoms, even if you've been experience them for months--benefit from ice.

What Works for You

The bottom line: different individuals will constitutionally vary greatly in their reactions. Some people are more prone to the types of inflammation exacerbated by heat, while others find their bodies contracting and tightening at the mere mention of ice. Try each option and pay close attention to how your body and mind respond, and let your gut be your guide. Ultimately, what works best for you is, well, what's best for you.

He who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead; his eyes are closed.

-Albert Einstein

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