



Whiplash and Neck Injury: Recovery and When to Worry

One-page summary of the full Spinemathema guide. Scan the QR code for the full guide, with references and audio.

Key points

- Whiplash is a neck injury caused by a sudden jolt of the head, most often in a road traffic collision. Doctors call the mix of symptoms that can follow a whiplash-associated disorder (WAD).
- The NHS says whiplash usually gets better within 2 to 3 months, although some people have symptoms for longer.
- Most people do not need an X-ray or scan. Emergency doctors use a checklist called the Canadian C-spine rule to decide who does.
- Keeping your neck moving and carrying on with everyday activities helps recovery. A neck collar is not recommended.
- Weakness, pins and needles, an electric shock feeling or trouble walking after a neck injury need urgent assessment.

Get urgent medical help after a neck injury if you have:

- Tingling or pins and needles on one or both sides of your body.
- Weakness in your hands, arms or legs.
- Problems walking or sitting upright.
- A sudden "electric shock" feeling in your neck and back, which may spread into your arms and legs.
- Severe pain that is not eased by simple painkillers.

Call NHS 111 or go to A&E for these symptoms, and do not drive or cycle until you have been checked.

Not sure how urgent it is? Call NHS 111. More warning signs: spinemathema.com/warning-signs

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General information only, not personal medical advice.

If you are worried about your symptoms, contact your GP, NHS 111, or in an emergency call 999.

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