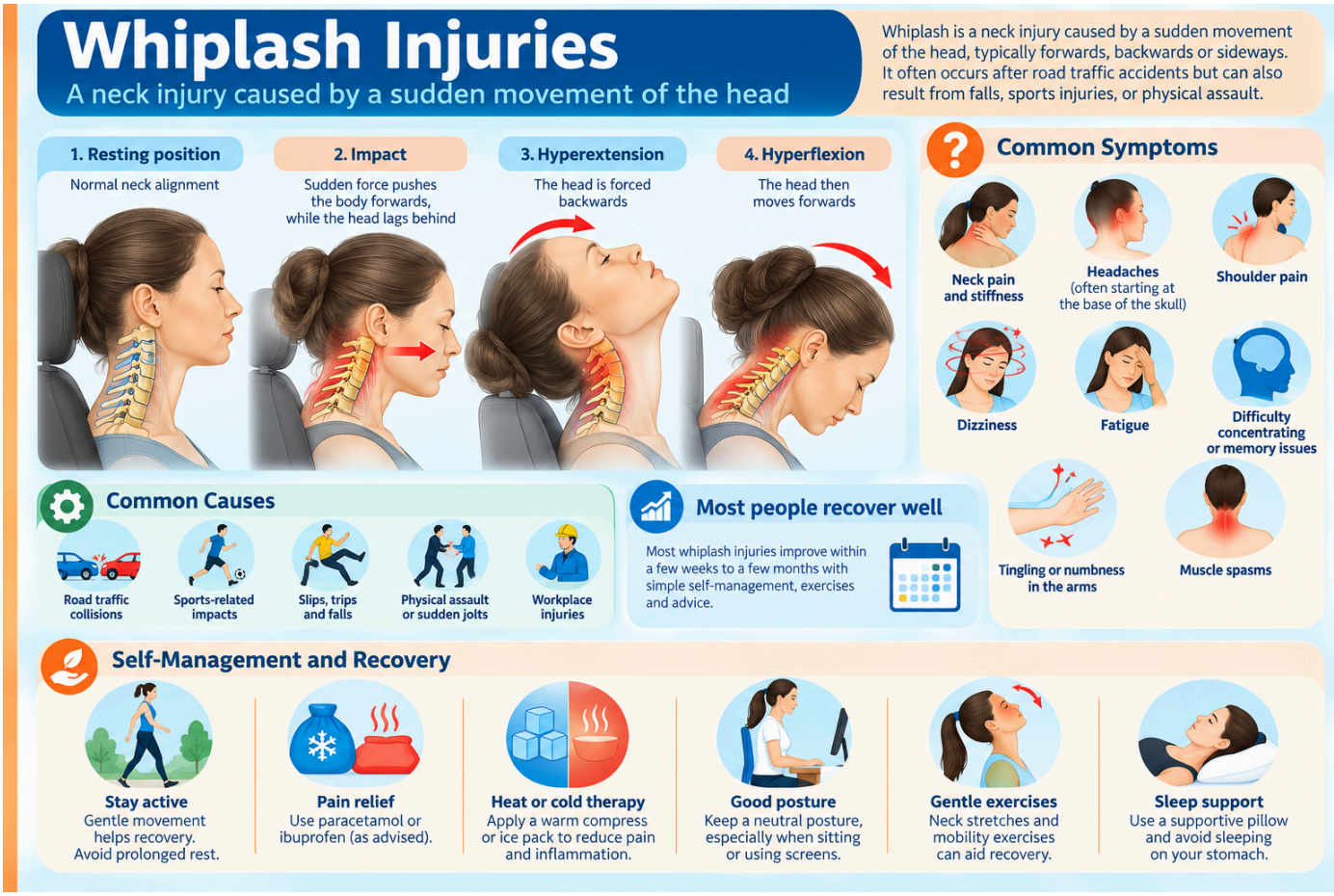
Trauma and Whiplash Injuries

Understanding symptoms, self-management and recovery



WHAT IS WHIPLASH?

Whiplash is a neck injury following a sudden movement of the head, often after a collision, fall or sports impact. Most people improve with gentle activity and time.

KEY RECOVERY MESSAGE

Keep moving gently, build activity gradually and seek medical advice for severe, worsening or concerning symptoms.

B-Well Physiotherapy Services | 0300 303 4811

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Symptoms and causes

Common symptoms

✓ Neck pain and stiffness

✓ Headaches, often starting at the base of the skull

✓ Shoulder pain

✓ Dizziness or fatigue

✓ Difficulty concentrating or memory problems

✓ Tingling or numbness in the arms

Symptoms can vary

Not everyone experiences the same symptoms. If you have new weakness, numbness or difficulty coordinating movements, seek medical assessment.

How can whiplash happen?

✓ Road traffic collisions

✓ Sports-related impacts

✓ Slips, trips and falls

✓ Physical assault or sudden jolts

✓ Workplace injuries

Understanding your injury

The sudden movement can strain structures in the neck. A clinician can assess your symptoms and advise on an appropriate recovery plan.

Self-management and movement

Stay gently active

Gentle movement helps recovery. Continue comfortable everyday activities and avoid long periods of complete rest. Build activity up gradually according to your symptoms.

Gentle neck movement

- ✓ Slowly turn your head from side to side within a comfortable range.
- ✓ Gently look up and down without forcing movement.
- ✓ Relax your shoulders and try gentle shoulder rolls.
- ✓ Stop an exercise if it causes marked worsening of symptoms, and seek advice if unsure.

Pain relief and comfort

Paracetamol or ibuprofen may help if suitable for you. Follow packet instructions and ask a pharmacist or GP if you are unsure. A wrapped cold pack or warm compress may ease discomfort.

Everyday posture and sleep

- ✓ Change position regularly when sitting or using screens.
- ✓ Keep screens at a comfortable height.
- ✓ Use a supportive pillow and avoid sleeping on your stomach if uncomfortable.

Recovery is individual

Symptoms may settle gradually. If pain limits your daily activities or is not improving after a few weeks, speak with a healthcare professional.

When to seek advice

Get urgent medical assessment

Following significant trauma, seek urgent help for severe neck pain, new arm or leg weakness, increasing numbness, problems walking or coordinating movements, or new bladder/bowel difficulties. For immediate danger or serious injury, call 999.

Contact a healthcare professional if:

✓ Your symptoms persist beyond a few weeks.

✓ Your pain is severe or getting worse.

✓ You develop weakness, numbness or coordination problems.

✓ Your symptoms make daily activities difficult.

Useful resources

✓ NHS whiplash advice: www.nhs.uk

✓ Chartered Society of Physiotherapy: www.csp.org.uk

✓ Your GP or local physiotherapy / MSK service

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This leaflet is for general information and does not replace individual assessment or medical advice.