Expert Recommendations for Treating Whiplash in the Acute Phase

More than 50% of patients injured in motor vehicle accidents receive whiplash diagnoses. Patients with acute neck pain develop chronic neck pain in 15% to 40% of cases.\textsuperscript{1} Can pearls of wisdom from high quality research help America do better with this troubling diagnosis? In the last decade, Charles P Vega, MD (Dept. of Family Medicine, University of California, Irvine) wrote that standard treatment for whiplash primarily consisted of rest and a soft cervical collar for comfort.\textsuperscript{2} Of course, he reported this in the midst of an evidence-based article unequivocally recommending active treatment including early mobilization as the new standard of care. Dr. Vega supports the recommendation that active whiplash treatment such as physical therapy begin within 96 hours of the accident.

This recommendation is largely influenced by Rosenfeld’s work published in Spine, the premier peer review journal for research on spine-related pathologies.\textsuperscript{3,5} Rosenfeld compared treatment plans for more than 100 whiplash patients. Groups received standard care (advice from a doctor for restricted activity and advice on stretching that was to begin several weeks after the accident), active care within 96 hours of the injury, and active care within 14 days of the injury. Active care consisted of physical therapy evaluation, posture control, and neck rotation exercises. At six month follow-up and at three-year follow-up, the active treatment groups experienced significantly less pain and sick leave. Rosenfeld and colleagues also compared cervical range of motion between treatment groups and a control group that had received no trauma to the neck. At three years, only the group that had received active treatment within 96 hours of the accident enjoyed cervical range of motion approaching that of the uninjured group ($P=.06-.08$). In terms of pain and range of motion after three years, it is better to receive active treatment within 96 hours of the accident.\textsuperscript{4} Rosenfeld also did an economic study taking into account the cost of physical therapy and the cost of time off work. They demonstrated that active treatment was less costly and more effective.\textsuperscript{5}

Rosenfeld’s work adds to an ever-growing body of evidence demonstrating how various approaches available in physical therapy improve outcomes for patients diagnosed with whiplash.\textsuperscript{5-10} One of the reasons Enfield Health & Wellness Center encourages doctors to refer injuries, as soon as possible, during the acute phase has to do with the laying down of new tissues. Put in basic terms, as the body lays down new tissues to heal a sprain, it has only one blueprint for the best way to lay those tissues down: movement. Without movement, the new tissue will form in counterproductive patterns. The knowledgeable therapists at Enfield Health & Wellness Center will introduce thorough but pain-free movement in the injured areas to help the healing response pattern new tissues correctly.

Help Your Patients Get the Care They Need Immediately.
Letter of Protection Accepted.

Studies on various types of spinal injuries and other injuries show much better outcomes when thorough, active care is begun without delay. We accept letters of protection so more of your patients can get the care they need immediately.
References


