



WOMEN AND WHIPLASH

By Dr. Jerry Zelm

Although men hate to admit it, statistics tend to prove that women under 30 are much safer drivers than their male counterparts. However, what is not generally known, is that women are also much more likely to sustain severe physical injuries than men, when involved in an accident of equal dynamics. Why? Simply because females often have less muscle to protect them during impact, and in some cases, a long, slender neck may actually contribute to the action of the classic “whiplash”, technically known as the hyperflexion/hyperextension injury.

When the victim’s head, which weighs between 7 and 11 pounds, is unexpectedly thrust backward against the headrest, the muscles react with a violent spasm in the opposite direction. During this process there can be stretching and tearing of the soft tissues of the neck and upper back, along with hemorrhaging of blood vessels, depending on the force and speed of the other vehicle. In extreme cases bone fracture may also be present. But in most cases the bones of the neck are just strained from their normal alignment, causing compression of spinal nerves, arteries and veins that exit through small openings in the neck. Chiropractors call this “vertebral subluxation.” These misaligned vertebrae irritate nerves and make neck movements painfully difficult. They also interfere with the vital messages that regularly travel back and forth from the brain to various parts of the body.

The first step following a severe accident is to rule out broken bones, damage to internal organs, and other complications, which may require emergency medical treatment. In some cases the injured will be transported to the ER of a nearby hospital. Once these areas have been ruled out, a trip to your family Chiropractor is in order. The absence of cuts and abrasions is no guarantee that your neck and back have survived the accident. Recent studies have shown that substantial injuries can be present even when the rate of impact is as low as 15MPH. Further, the Doctor of Chiropractic is uniquely trained to evaluate and treat this injury. His or her first goal will be to reduce the pain and swelling and make you as comfortable as possible. Once the swelling is reduced it’s time to restore structural alignment with gentle spinal adjustments. This can usually begin during the first 24 hours using soft tissue and low force techniques. Home-care methods, such as ice applications and mild stretching exercises, may be advised to support the early stages of healing. Some Chiropractors also use physical or massage therapy methods.

The average treatment program varies with each individual. Factors such as severity of injury, age and overall health of the patient, daily demands at home and work, and mental makeup, all require special consideration.

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Failure to receive appropriate examination and treatment during the first weeks following the injury can allow a temporary condition to develop into a permanent one. Many arthritic necks, discovered in later life, can be traced to earlier traumas that never were properly evaluated or treated. Also, don't be pressured to sign off on your medical coverage until you are released from your treatment program. Insurance adjusters have a tendency to try to settle early, before your medical bills get a chance to grow. And finding the right practitioner for you is also of utmost importance. If you are not feeling better after a couple weeks of care, it's time for a change.

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