Whiplash! The 3 Phases of Healing

Introduction-Full recovery from a whiplash injury requires chiropractic care. and the insurance you already have will most likely cover chiropractic treatment for a whiplash injury. My job better is to help you fully recover from spinal injuries and lead a better, healthier lifestyle.

Let's take a look at what happens during a whiplash injury. Your head acts like a bowling ball balanced on the top of a stick. The car and your body are moving forward until the car suddenly stops. Your head continues to whip forward on your neck stretching or even dislocating the vertebrae. Then it rebounds back, slamming against your headrest cushion, compressing your spine. Even at speeds as slow as 5 m.p.h., the forward momentum of your head can cause severe damage. The full extent of the damage may not be apparent until 2 weeks after the accident, when you start experiencing stiffness, pain and other symptoms.
Untreated whiplash injuries may result in permanent loss of mobility, arthritis, pain and other symptoms. While emergency room medical treatment may be necessary, it seeks to immobilize the injury. Without chiropractic care, this can result in reduced range of motion, discomfort and prolonged pain. Chiropractic treatment is essential early in the healing process to assure a better chance of complete recovery. Let's take a few minutes to look at what happens during recovery.

The Three Phases Of Healing

There are three phases of healing associated with whiplash. The acute inflammatory phase, the repair or regeneration phase and finally the remodeling phase.

The Acute Inflammatory Phase:

The initial reaction to injury is inflammation. Joints become swollen and tender. We refer to this as the acute inflammatory phase, which may last up to 72 hours. Signs of inflammation include heat, pain, swelling and redness. Inflammation results
from damage to nerves, muscle tissue and ligaments. Ligaments are fibrous tissue that attach bones together. Torn ligaments allow excessive movement which can create pinching of nerves. This in turn can cause weakness, pain, tingling and numbness. Completely destroyed nerve cells cannot regenerate. Consequently, muscle fibers that attempt to grow cannot mature in the absence of nerve supply.

**The Repair or Regeneration Phase:** This lasts from 72 hours to eight weeks. During this phase the body seems to lay down scar tissue to correct the injury. It’s laid down in an irregular pattern different from that of the original injury. The repair tissue is thus less elastic and less flexible. This results in stiffness and pain. Rigid scar tissue can interfere with the growth of nerves. The lack of nerve supply results in useless muscle tissue.

**The Remodeling Phase:** The scar tissue takes its final form in the remodeling phase. This last stage takes from three weeks.
Scar tissue initially forms to help muscles withstand stress but can continue to contract up to six months following an injury. Unless continually mobilized, the scar tissue fibers can stick together inhibiting movement. An inactive lifestyle can further lessen mobility and range of motion.

**Summary:** To summarize, the initial reaction to injury is inflammation. Repair of damaged tissue begins within 72 hours. Scar tissue, rigid and less flexible can interfere with nerve supply, resulting in weak and useless muscle. Finally, the collagen fibers composing the repair tissue contract to protect the muscles from additional stress. This results in less and less range of motion. Although standard emergency room treatment may be necessary following an accident, chiropractic reconstructive care is essential to recovery.

**Medical Treatment** is usually limited to immobilization of the injury with a cervical collar. Pain medication, muscle relaxants and bed rest
are often prescribed. Scar tissue formed in an immobile state results in sore, weak less flexible and more sensitive muscles. There is an increased chance of flare ups and re-injury. Lack of motion in one level of the spine causes excessive motion in other areas. According to studies, 39% of whiplash victims develop degenerative disc disease or thinning of the discs. This results in osteoarthritis. Osteoarthritis forms in the neck as a result of disc degeneration. It can cause pain and stiffness and limitation of motion. Degenerative disc disease caused by immobile scar tissue ensures future pain and disability.
Reconstructive Chiropractic Care is essential for total recovery and ideally begins within eight weeks of injury. Mobilization of the joints of the neck aids in the laying of collagen which enables fibers to glide rather than stick. Looser scar tissue allows for greater freedom of movement. What’s unique about chiropractic care is spinal manipulation. That is gentle realignment of the parts of the spine to restore good posture and natural movement. Pettibon fulcrum exercises use foam wedges to allow you to stretch injured areas. Isometric exercises can be used to increase range of motion in the ligaments of the neck. Deep tissue and trigger point massage can soften and relaxed tight, stiff muscles. Chiropractic Biophysics, cervical tractioning and regular adjustments can help to restore normal curvature of the neck and improved posture. Ligament rehabilitation is not complete until the muscles spanning the joint are fully restored to their former power. The goal of soft tissue rehabilitation is recovery of full strength, normal range of motion and
freedom from pain. Depending on the severity of the damage,

chiropractic care may be needed up to one year following your injury to keep scar loose you and maintain range of motion.

Review: Reconstructive Chiropractic Care

Postural exercises and cervical tractioning improve posture and increase the space between discs.

Deep tissue massage results in long lasting relaxation of tight, stiff muscles.

Range of motion exercises increase flexibility.

Depending on the severity of damage, chiropractic care may be needed up to one year, in order to maintain normal range of motion and prevent disc degeneration.
Conclusion: Whiplash injury can be dangerous and debilitating. Chiropractic care seeks to restore normal range of motion and full muscle strength. Freedom from pain, improved posture and the prevention of disc generation are the direct results of your commitment to honor your chiropractor’s plan for healing. Honor your body. Take the time to explore chiropractic care for your whiplash injury and recover the right way.

Make the right choice. Choose Chiropractic!