

# Whiplash

## TERMINOLOGY (SYNONYMS)

- Hyperextension and hyperflexion injury
- Neck strain/sprain
- Cervical stain/sprain

## INTRODUCTION

The term whiplash refers to a type of spine injury associated with a ballistic trauma. It is usually associated with soft tissue injury to the muscles and ligaments of the spine, occurring following a motor vehicle accident. Whiplash syndrome is a mechanistic term that is characterized by a collection of symptoms that occur following injury to the neck, usually because of rapid acceleration and deceleration of the spine. This mechanism of injury often results in strain/sprain of supportive elements of the neck such as muscles, ligaments and tendons. In more severe cases, this may result in small tears involving these supportive tissues and may lead to compromise of the underlying disc which may be vulnerable to rapid unguarded movements secondary to degenerative changes.

The most common cause of whiplash is vehicular trauma (automobile accident) which causes the head and neck to suddenly move forward and backward. If the head is turned at the time of impact there may be injurious rotation of the neck at the time of impact. Whiplash may involve combined neck rotation and lateral movement. Whiplash may also be associated with direct blunt trauma, especially in incidents where proper restraint belts were not being used.