

# **PAINS OF AN AUTO ACCIDENT**

**By Dr. Heath Schipp**

Have you ever been involved in an auto accident? With over 12 million motor vehicle accidents occurring annually in the United States, chances are sooner or later you will be involved in an auto accident. Many injuries can occur from these accidents but two of the most common symptoms are whiplash and back pain.

## **Whiplash**

Neck pain that occurs after an accident is commonly referred to as “whiplash”. Whiplash occurs because of the sudden vigorous movements of the head forward, backwards, and side to side during an accident. These movements cause tearing in the muscles and ligaments of the head and neck. After tearing, the muscles go into spasm in an effort to splint and support the head, thus limiting excessive movement. The neck pain typically starts between a few hours and many days later. The pain can be felt in the neck or it can cause radiating pain into the shoulder and hands, which is a result of a nerve getting pinched on by the bones or muscles.

Almost seventy percent of those with whiplash complain of a headache. The typical headache starts in the back of the head and works forward to behind the eyes and up to the temples. These headaches, like the neck pain, are often a result of the tight muscles trying to keep the head stable. With proper chiropractic care these pains can be alleviated quickly.

## **Back Pain**

Middle and low back injuries are also common because of auto accidents. During the accident the torso moves forward and the shoulder strap-locks. However, the shoulder strap is only on one shoulder, which allows the opposite shoulder to continue forward and twist. The bending and twisting motion is what tears and injures the muscles of the back. The muscles go into spasm to protect the area from further damage and you feel back pain. The twisting and bending of the spine can also cause the vertebra to rotate and move, thus pinching nerves. Pain may radiate down the legs or into the arms and fingers.

## **Treatment**

Both whiplash and back pain have a variety of treatment options. Treatments include hot and cold packs, chiropractic adjustments, electrical stimulation, and pain medicine (if needed). Exercises may also be used to restore the range of motion. The chiropractor will examine the whole body to determine the extent of the injuries, and then he will determine what kind of treatment is needed to alleviate the problem. Pain will usually subside within several weeks to months, with proper treatment. However, non-treatment of injuries has resulted in lifelong pain and headaches.

Use the following tips if you have an auto accident:

1. Even a minor accident can cause injury. Never assume that you are not injured just because there is little or no damage to your car. Seek professional care immediately.
2. If a paramedic suggests you go to the emergency room, don't decline. You may be suffering from shock, and will be unable to properly judge the situation. Even the smallest fracture in your spine can be very serious!
3. Muscle aches, soreness, headaches and other symptoms associated with whiplash injuries may not show up until 24-72 hours after the accident. The sooner you seek treatment, the less likely it will be that you will have severe pain or permanent damage.
4. Studies show that ICE applied immediately to the injured area will help keep swelling and pain to a minimum
5. Make sure you exchange information at the scene of the accident. Obtain an accident report from the police as soon as possible.

If injured in an accident you should seek help immediately by a chiropractor or another doctor, because a more serious problem could be present. Be sure to ask the chiropractor if their office treats auto accidents. In Kentucky your auto insurance should pick up the treatment bill, so you have nothing to lose but your own health.