

The Return of the “Fender Bender”

By James L. Holding, DC, CCSP,
Holding Chiropractic &
Sports Injury Center

Contrary to popular belief, the term “whiplash” is not a specific injury or disease itself. Rather, it is a type of lashing movement that can cause a variety of injuries to the neck and back. According to the National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration, whiplash injuries are on the rise.

How does Whiplash Occur?

Although auto accidents are considered the most common cause of whiplash injury, they can also be caused by a sudden unexpected movement such as a blow to the head, a fall from a horse, a fall on the stairs, a sports injury or even attempting to recover your balance after slipping on a wet floor or icy sidewalk.

In an automobile accident the body is initially thrust forward but the head stays behind, as the car is literally pushed out from underneath the occupant, then as the head is forced backward the muscles and ligaments that support normal spinal alignment are torn. Suddenly the car stops, and the head is thrown violently forward tearing additional muscles and ligaments.

Common Symptoms

Unfortunately, in the case of a whiplash injury, the symptoms may not appear for several days, weeks, or even months, following the incident. By then, you may not even associate the stiff neck, persistent headaches, fatigue, tension in your shoulders and difficulty concentrating with their real cause—and in better than 50% of the cases, there is also back pain.

Research shows that for people with whiplash associated disorders (WAD) 62-98% complain of neck pain, 66-70% of those injured complain of headaches and in better than 50% of these injuries pain radiates into the shoulder blade area as well.¹ Despite the fact that the neck is only about five inches long, it is the most flexible part of the spine because it has 48 joints, activated by over a hundred muscles. Since the nerves leading from the brain to virtually every part of the body must pass through the neck, a whiplash injury can injure these nerves and cause problems in any area of the body.

According to the research, the most effective treatment is chiropractic manipulation. Two recent studies have added to the already substantial body of evidence that shows manipu-

lation to be superior for treatment of whiplash associated disorders (WAD).

The studies found that patients enjoyed significant improvement in all measured outcomes with chiropractic manipulation. The researchers concluded that chiropractic care may be “the first important step towards early active rehabilitation and returning to activities of daily living.”² These studies also revealed that whiplash patients with neck pain have better results with early activity and mobilization than with standard medical treatment.³ After three years of reviewing 10,382 articles on neck injuries, the researchers recommended spinal manipulation as most effective. The studies clearly show chiropractic care to be effective for the treatment of whiplash injuries and more effective than other forms of care.⁴

Finally, untreated or improperly treated whiplash associated disorders (WAD) can lead to chronic neck and shoulder pain with recurrent headaches, and far more serious problems such as osteoarthritis, months or even years later.¹ In my view, the proper evaluation and treatment of a whiplash associated disorder (WAD) can often save a lifetime of pain and discomfort.