

## Motor Vehicle Accident: General Precautions

Strong forces may be involved in a car accident. It is important to watch for any new symptoms that may signal hidden injury.

It is normal to feel sore and tight in your muscles and back the next day, and not just the muscles you initially injured. Remember, all the parts of your body are connected, so while initially one area hurts, the next day another may hurt. Also, when you injure yourself, it causes inflammation, which then causes the muscles to tighten up and hurt more. After the initial worsening, it should gradually improve over the next few days. However, more severe pain should be reported.

Even without a definite head injury, you can still get a concussion from your head suddenly jerking forward, backward or sideways when falling. Concussions and even bleeding can still occur, especially if you have had a recent injury or take blood thinner. It is common to have a mild headache and feel tired and even nauseous or dizzy.

A motor vehicle accident, even a minor one, can be very stressful and cause emotional or mental symptoms after the event. These may include:

- General sense of anxiety and fear
- Recurring thoughts or nightmares about the accident
- Trouble sleeping or changes in appetite
- Feeling depressed, sad or low in energy
- Irritable or easily upset
- Feeling the need to avoid activities, places or people that remind you of the accident

In most cases, these are normal reactions and are not severe enough to get in the way of your usual activities. These feelings usually go away within a few days, or sometimes after a few weeks.

## Home care

### Muscle pain, sprains and strains

Even if you have no visible injury, it is not unusual to be sore all over, and have new aches and pains the first couple of days after an accident. Take it easy at first, and don't over do it.

- Initially, do not try to stretch out the sore spots. If there is a strain, stretching may make it worse. Massage may help relax the muscles without stretching them.
- You can use an ice pack or cold compress on and off to the sore spots 10 to 20 minutes at a time, as often as you feel comfortable. This may help reduce the inflammation, swelling and pain. You can make an ice pack by wrapping a

plastic bag of ice cubes or crushed ice in a thin towel or using a bag of frozen peas or corn.

### **Wound care**

- If you have any scrapes or abrasions, they usually heal within 10 days. It is important to keep the abrasions clean while they first start to heal. However, an infection may occur even with proper care, so watch for early signs of infection such as:
  - Increasing redness or swelling around the wound
  - Increased warmth of the wound
  - Red streaking lines away from the wound
  - Draining pus

### **Medicines**

- Talk to your doctor before taking new medicines, especially if you have other medical problems or are taking other medicines.
- If you need anything for pain, you can take acetaminophen or ibuprofen, unless you were given a different pain medicine to use. Talk with your doctor before using these medicines if you have chronic liver or kidney disease, or ever had a stomach ulcer or gastrointestinal bleeding, or are taking blood thinner medicines.
- Be careful if you are given prescription pain medicines, narcotics, or medicine for muscle spasm. They can make you sleepy, dizzy and can affect your coordination, reflexes and judgment. Do not drive or do work where you can injure yourself when taking them.

### **Follow-up care**

Follow up with your healthcare provider, or as advised. If emotional or mental symptoms last more than 3 weeks, follow up with your doctor. You may have a more serious traumatic stress reaction. There are treatments that can help.

If X-rays or CT scans were done, you will be notified if there are any concerns that affect your treatment.

### **Call 911**

Call 911 if any of these occur:

- Trouble breathing
- Confused or difficulty arousing
- Fainting or loss of consciousness
- Rapid heart rate
- Trouble with speech or vision, weakness of an arm or leg

- Trouble walking or talking, loss of balance, numbness or weakness in one side of your body, facial droop

### **When to seek medical advice**

Call your healthcare provider right away if any of the following occur:

- New or worsening headache or vision problems
- New or worsening neck, back, abdomen, arm or leg pain
- Nausea or vomiting
- Dizziness or vertigo
- Redness, swelling, or pus coming from any wound

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