

Long-Term Prognosis of Soft-Tissue Injuries of the Neck

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FROM ABSTRACT

We reviewed 43 patients who had sustained soft-tissue injuries of the neck after a mean 10.8 years.

Of these, only 12% had recovered completely.

Residual symptoms were intrusive in 28% and severe in 12%.

Pain in the neck and lower back was the commonest complaint and older patients had a worse prognosis.

After two years, symptoms did not alter with further passage of time.

THESE AUTHORS ALSO NOTE:

"It is difficult to give a confident long-term prognosis for patients who have suffered soft-tissue injuries of the neck following a rear-end collision."

In this study, 43 patients were followed-up at 10.3 years (range 8 to 12) after being injured in a motor vehicle accident.

88% of the patients had been involved in rear-end collisions and 48% had been wearing seat-belts.

Residual symptoms at follow-up:

Neck pain	74%
Paraesthesia	45%
Lower back pain	42%
Headache	33%
Dizziness	19%
Auditory symptoms	14%
Dysphagia	2%
Visual symptoms	2%

A "little under half of whom considered it [low back pain] more troublesome than their neck pain."

“Auditory symptoms comprised tinnitus and deafness in equal proportion.”

Patients were subdivided into four groups on the basis of their symptoms:

Group A (12%) were free of any discomfort and considered that they had made a complete recovery from their accident.

Group B (48%) were left with mild symptoms which did not interfere with their work or leisure activities.

Group C (28%) complained of intrusive symptoms which handicapped work and leisure and caused them to seek relief by frequent intermittent use of analgesia, orthoses or physiotherapy.

Group D (12%) suffered from severe problems, had lost their jobs, relied continually on orthoses or analgesics, and had undergone repeated medical consultations.

DISCUSSION

35% of those injured in motor vehicle collisions will experience delayed symptoms.
[Important]

“Seat-belts alone afford no protection [against hyperextension whiplash injuries].”

In the review of a number of whiplash studies, “it would seem that most patients have reached their final state within two years of injury.”

“Patients with objective neurological signs and restriction of neck movement were more likely to experience continuing symptoms.”

The fact that symptoms do not resolve even after a mean 10 years supports the conclusion that litigation does not prolong symptoms.

KEY POINTS FROM DAN MURPHY

- 1) In patients who had sustained soft-tissue injuries of the neck after a mean 10.8 years:
 - A)) Only 12% had recovered completely.
 - B)) Residual symptoms were intrusive in 28%.
 - C)) Residual symptoms were severe in 12%.
- 2) Neck pain and low back was the commonest complaint 10.8 years after whiplash injury.
- 3) Older patients have a worse prognosis.

- 4) After two years, symptoms did not alter with further passage of time.
- 5) Residual symptoms at 10.8 years following whiplash injury include:
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|-------------------|-----|
| Neck pain | 74% |
| Paraesthesia | 45% |
| Lower back pain | 42% |
| Headache | 33% |
| Dizziness | 19% |
| Auditory symptoms | 14% |
| Dysphagia | 2% |
| Visual symptoms | 2% |
- 6) "Auditory symptoms comprised tinnitus and deafness."
- 7) In this study, 40% of the whiplash injured patients suffered from significant disabling symptoms that required continued treatment 10.8 years after being injured.
- 8) 35% of those injured in motor vehicle collisions will experience delayed symptoms.
[Important]
- 9) "Seat-belts alone afford no protection [against hyperextension whiplash injuries]."
- 10) In the review of a number of whiplash studies, "it would seem that most patients have reached their final state within two years of injury."
- 11) "Patients with objective neurological signs and restriction of neck movement were more likely to experience continuing symptoms."
- 12) The fact that symptoms do not resolve even after a mean 10 years supports the conclusion that litigation does not prolong symptoms.