

Pain Management Coding Alert

Terminology Check: Remember Many Scenarios Can Lead to Whiplash

Also learn the difference between neck 'sprains' and 'strains'.

Whiplash is a neck injury due to forceful, rapid back-and-forth movement of the neck, like the cracking of a whip. Many people associate whiplash with car accidents, but you can also suffer whiplash because of a sports injury or other trauma that causes neck strain when the head jerks forward or backward.

Difference: Neck strains are often confused with neck sprains, but the conditions are different. Neck strains are caused by damage to the muscle or the tendons that connect muscles to bones. Neck sprains are caused by tearing of the ligaments that connect the bones to each other.

Common signs and symptoms of whiplash include neck pain (723.1, Cervicalgia), stiffness (724.9, Other unspecified back disorders), and headaches (784.0). Most people with whiplash recover within a few months after a course of pain medication, exercise, and other treatments. Some people, however, experience chronic neck pain and other ongoing complications because of whiplash.

The 723 category usually is associated with neck conditions, whereas 724 is for back conditions that don't include the neck area.