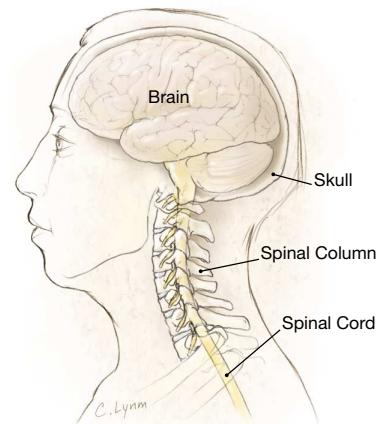


# Neck Injuries

**N**eck injuries can be serious and can affect your ability to walk, stand normally, and move with ease. This is because neck injuries may result in damage to the **spinal cord**, which connects your brain to the rest of your body. Neck injuries account for over a million visits to physicians and over 31,000 injuries requiring hospitalization annually in the United States. An article in the October 17, 2001, issue of *JAMA* discusses use of **radiographs** (x-rays) to detect neck injuries in patients seen in emergency departments.



## COMMON CAUSES OF NECK INJURIES

- Motor vehicle crashes are a major cause of neck injuries. To protect against injury when in a motor vehicle, always wear your seat belt and be sure the car seat headrest is not in the down position unless you are shorter than 5 feet 2 inches. Do not drink and drive.
- Be cautious and wear a properly fitted helmet when riding a bicycle, motorcycle, or all-terrain vehicle.
- A direct blow to the face, neck, head, or back can cause neck injury.
- Diving into shallow water in pools or other bodies of water is frequently the cause of neck injury. Never dive into water of unknown depth or from a high place.
- Participation in contact sports can result in neck and spine injuries. Always wear recommended protective gear such as helmets, pads, and guards, making sure they fit correctly. Be certain that any equipment used is in good condition.
- Shootings and stab wounds can cause neck injuries and require emergency treatment.

## FIRST AID FOR NECK INJURIES

Dial 911 immediately for emergency assistance if you suspect someone has sustained a neck injury. While you are waiting for medical assistance, follow these guidelines:

- Do not move the injured person unless he or she is in danger of further injury. If the person must be moved, get others to help and use a rigid, sturdy support (such as a plank) for moving. Roll the entire body as a unit, moving the head and neck together, onto the surface. Use belts or rope to keep the person's body from moving and hold the surface as horizontally as possible.
- Do not bend, twist, or lift the injured person's head, neck, or body. Do not remove a helmet or other protective equipment the person may be wearing. Do not let the person move his or her head, neck, or body.
- Check the injured person's breathing and be sure the nose, throat, and mouth are clear. If he or she vomits or is bleeding from the mouth or nose, roll the person on his or her side, keeping the head, neck, and back in a straight line.
- Place rolled up towels or clothing on both sides of the person's head and neck to prevent movement. Cover the person for warmth until help arrives.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons  
847/823-7186  
[www.aaos.org](http://www.aaos.org)
- American Association of Neurological Surgeons  
888/566-2267  
[www.neurosurgery.org](http://www.neurosurgery.org)

## INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page Index on JAMA's Web site at [www.jama.com](http://www.jama.com).

Sources: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, American Association of Neurological Surgeons, American College of Emergency Physicians, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Mayo Clinic, National Institutes of Health

Lise M. Stevens, MA, Writer

Cassio Lynn, MA, Illustrator

Richard M. Glass, MD, Editor

The JAMA Patient Page is a public service of JAMA. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in most instances, but they are not a substitute for medical diagnosis. For specific information concerning your personal medical condition, JAMA suggests that you consult your physician. This page may be reproduced noncommercially by physicians and other health care professionals to share with patients. Any other reproduction is subject to AMA approval. To purchase bulk reprints, call 718/946-7424.

