

Cervical Spine Ligament Injury

What is the cervical spine?

The cervical spine is the upper seven vertebrae of your spine. The spine holds the spinal cord in place so that breathing, movement, and feeling can happen in your body.

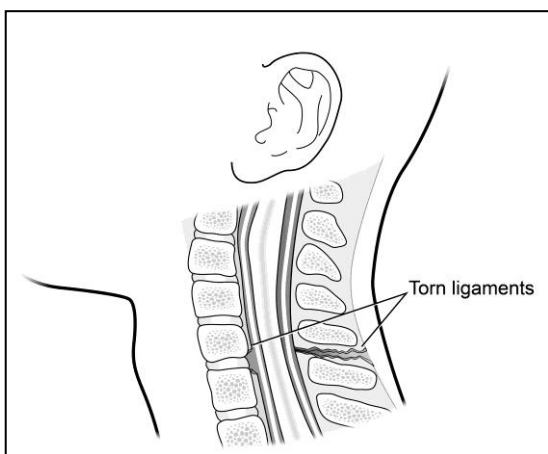
What are cervical spine ligaments?

Ligaments connect bone to bone. Spine ligaments hold the vertebrae of the spinal column in place. They protect the bones and nerves that make up the vertebrae and spinal cord. The neck is an exposed part of the body, which puts these very important ligaments at risk. There is a need for extra care to keep the spine safe when they are injured,

What is a cervical spine ligament injury?

When your body receives an impact that is fast and hard, the movement pulls the ligaments that are around the spine and causes injury. It can cause either stretching or tearing of the ligament. You will be told you have either a sprain/strain or a tear of the ligament after tests show what has occurred. With both injuries, you will have pain and swelling, but a tear will be more painful, and more serious.

What tests will I need?



- X-rays and a physical exam will be done to look for ligament injury.
- In some cases, an MRI may be done.

How is it treated?

Based on your injury, you may

- Be treated in a cervical collar, called a PMT collar.
- Require surgery.
- Need a halo vest to keep your head and shoulders steady and not moving.

What should I expect while in the hospital?

When you get to the hospital, special care of the spine will be taken until the extent of the injury is known. A doctor will check your neck in a safe way that protects your neck. You will have Spine imaging (X-ray, CT and/or MRI) to check for any fractures or ligament injuries. Once your doctor has the results of these tests, your treatment plan will be discussed.

With a cervical spine ligament injury your neck collar will stay in place.

A rehabilitation plan will be started which will include Physical and Occupational therapy.

Physical therapy will work with you on how to move safely by yourself or with the help of a mobility device. They will teach you movements you should do that will help you regain your strength in a safe way.

Occupational therapy will help you find safe ways to do the things you must do for yourself each day, such as bathing and dressing. They will also help nursing staff to

teach a family member how to care for your neck collar at home.

Restrictions while in your collar will include:

- **No lifting greater than 10 pounds**
- **No raising your arms above your head, and**
- **No driving.**

When you can go home, you will be told how to safely care for your injury. Appointments will be set up for you to continue care in the clinic if needed.

Why must I be cautious?

Further injury can occur to the bones in the spine or the spinal cord if the neck is not well supported with a collar while the ligaments are healing. This is why it is vital to follow your doctor's orders and wear your collar at all times.

How long will the treatment take?

Your doctors will decide how long your injury needs to be treated.

Phone Numbers

Call if you have problems after you leave the hospital.

- Patients of the Neurosurgery Spine and Orthopedic Spine Clinic: Call **(608)265-3207**
- **After hours, on weekends, and holidays** call UW Hospital Paging Operator at **(608)262-0486. Ask for the Neurosurgery or Orthopedic Spine doctor on call.** Give your name and phone number with area code to the operator. A health care provider will call you back.
- If you live out of the area, call **1-800-323-8942** and ask for your clinic.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 10/2017. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#6929.