Cervical Spine Ligament Injury

What is the cervical spine?
The cervical spine is the upper seven vertebrae of your spine. The spine serves to hold the spinal cord in place so basic functions, such as breathing, movement, and feeling can occur in your body.

What are cervical spine ligaments?
Ligaments are structures that connect bone to bone. Spine ligaments are structures that hold the vertebrae of the spinal column in place. They provide protection to the vertebrae and spinal cord. The neck is an exposed and vulnerable part of the body. These ligaments are very important in keeping the spine safe.

What is a cervical spine ligament injury?
This injury occurs when your body sustains a rapid and forceful impact. This rapid movement pulls the ligaments that are around the spine. This movement causes injury to them. There are two types of injuries. The first one is called a strain. This is where the ligament is stretched, but not torn. You will have some pain and swelling. The other type is a tear. Each injury varies in how the ligament tears, but overall, this injury is more painful and 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.
- 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 arrive at the hospital, you will be placed on spine precautions. A physical exam will be done. You will have Spine imaging (X-ray, CT and/or MRI) to check for spinal fractures and ligament injuries. Once your doctor has the results of these tests, your treatment plan will be decided upon.

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 mobility and work with you so that you are safe to move around by yourself or with an assist of a mobility device. They will teach you exercises to help you regain your strength.

Occupational therapy will help you with ways of daily living 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 have instructions on how to care for your injury. Appointments will be set up for you to follow-up.

**What are other complications?**

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 to call if you have problems after you leave the hospital.

Patients of the Neurosurgery Clinic (608)263-1410

Patients of the Orthopedic Rehabilitation Spine Clinic (608)265-3507

After hours, nights, weekends, and holidays, this will give you the paging operator. Ask for the resident on call for your clinic. Leave your name and phone number with the area code. The doctor will call you back.

If you live out of the area, call 1-800-323-8942 and ask for your clinic.