

CONCUSSION GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

What is a concussion?

Concussion is the most common head injury in sports. Most concussions are considered a functional brain injury caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body. Signs and symptoms of a concussion vary considerably and can disrupt the way the brain normally works. Most athletes with concussions do not suffer loss of consciousness. There is no such thing as a minor concussion. Even a “ding” or a bump on the head can be serious enough to cause missed time from sport participation. Once a player has a concussion they may be at higher risk for another. The greatest risk is when the athlete has not recovered from the previous concussion, and recent evidence shows younger athletes recover slower.

What are the signs and symptoms?

You can't see a concussion. Signs and symptoms of concussion can show up right after the injury or may take days or weeks to fully appear. If your teen reports any symptoms of concussion, or if you notice the symptoms yourself, seek medical attention right away. It is important to know that your child does not need to be knocked out (lose consciousness) to have had a concussion. A variety of problems may happen after a concussion, including:

Early signs and symptoms of concussion may include:

- Confusion and poor concentration.
- Headache, blurry vision, upset stomach or vomiting.
- Difficulty remembering the time, date, place, opposing team, score, or period of the game.
- Having difficulty remembering things that happened before and after the injury.
- Ringing in the ears.
- Feeling “sleepy”, “sluggish”, “dazed”, or feeling “foggy.”
- Poor coordination or balance.
- Slow to answer questions or follow directions. Easily distracted.
- Strange or inappropriate emotions (i.e. laughing, crying, getting mad easily).
- Not playing as well.

Late signs and symptoms of concussion may include:

- Fatigue.
- Irritability.
- Memory problems.
- Mood disturbance.
- Persistent headaches.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Poor attention and concentration.
- Feeling “in a fog”

What should you do if your child gets a concussion?

Your child should stop playing his/her sport right away. He/she should not be left alone and should be seen by a health care provider as soon as possible that day. If your child is knocked out, call an ambulance to take them to a hospital immediately. Do not move your child until the paramedics arrive.

How long will it take for my child to get better?

The signs and symptoms of concussion (see above) often last for 7-10 days but may last much longer. In some cases, children may take many weeks or months to heal. Having had previous concussions may increase the chance that a child may take longer to heal.

How is a concussion treated?

The most important treatment for a concussion is both physical and mental rest. The child should not exercise or do any activities that may make him/her worse, like riding a bike, wrestling with siblings or friends, playing video games, cellular phone/texting, or working on the computer. If your child goes back to activities before he/she is completely better, he/she is more likely to get worse, and to have symptoms longer. Even though it is very hard for an active child to rest, this is the most important step. Once your child is completely better at rest, he/she can start a step-wise increase in activities. It is important that your child is seen by a health care provider before he/she begins the steps needed to return to activity, to make sure he/she is completely better.

When can my child return to school?

Sometimes children who have a concussion may find it hard to concentrate in school and may get a worse headache or feel sick to their stomach if they are in school. Children should stay home from school if their symptoms get worse while they are in class. Once they feel better, they can try going back to school at first for half days, and if they are okay with that, then they can go back full time.

When can my child return to sport?

It is very important that your child NOT go back to sports if he/she has any concussion symptoms or signs.

When should I take my child to the doctor?

Every child who gets a head injury should be seen by a health care provider as soon as possible. You should contact them immediately – and proceed directly to your local EMERGENCY ROOM -- if, after being told your child has a concussion, he/she has worsening of symptoms such as:

- Becomes more confused
- Has a headache that is getting worse
- Vomiting
- Doesn't wake up
- Has any trouble walking
- Has a seizure
- Has strange behavior
- You are more concerned

Problems caused by a head injury can get worse later that day or night. The child should not be left alone and should be checked throughout the night. If you have any concerns about the child's breathing or how he/she is sleeping, wake him/her up. Otherwise, let him/her sleep. If he/she seems to be getting worse, you should seek further medical care immediately.

No child should go back to sport until they have been cleared to do so by a health care professional with experience in the treatment of concussions.

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