



Concussion Guide for Families

What is a concussion?

A concussion is a mild injury to the brain that disrupts the function of the brain (how the brain normally works). Usually it is caused by a sudden blow or impact to the head. It is NOT necessary to be knocked out or have loss of consciousness to have a concussion. Another term for concussion is mild traumatic brain injury (mild TBI). Even though a concussion might be called a “mild” injury, it still must be taken seriously because it is an injury to the brain.

What should parents do after a concussion?

A medical doctor should be involved in your child’s care because, in rare cases, severe medical problems occur. Watch your child carefully for the first one to two days after injury. Giving acetaminophen (Tylenol) for headaches is OK, but no other medications should be given during this time without a doctor’s approval. Seek IMMEDIATE medical help if your child displays:

- A headache that is getting worse, lasts for a long time or is severe
- Persistent Confusion, extreme sleepiness or trouble waking up
- Recurrent Vomiting
- Weakness, numbness or trouble walking or talking
- A seizure or convulsion (arms or legs shake uncontrollably)
- Any other sudden change in thinking or behavior

What should you generally expect?

Most young people recover completely from a simple concussion within one to two weeks. But, some people can take longer to recover. Common symptoms seen after a concussion are listed below. Talk with your child’s doctor about any symptoms you see in your child after a concussion. As noted below there are many different symptoms that can be caused by a concussion and every concussion is different.

Physical

- Headaches
- Sick to stomach or vomiting
- Dizziness or balance problems
- Low energy or being run down
- Trouble with vision/seeing
- Bothered by light or noise

Cognitive (Thinking)

- Slowed thinking
- Trouble paying attention
- Difficulty remembering
- Acting like “in a fog”
- Easily confused
- Poorer school performance

Psychiatric (Behavioral or Emotional)

- Irritability or grouchiness
- Easily upset or frustrated
- Nervousness
- Sadness
- Acting without thinking
- Any personality change
- Sleep problems

Where do we follow up?

All concussions should have close follow up with a physician experienced in concussion care until resolution of symptoms and return to normal activity. In particular return to school with accommodations and graded return to physical activity should be directed by medical personal to ensure optimal care during critical healing window. All athletes should be medically cleared by physician prior to return to play.

Reasons to consider seeing medical or concussion specialists include:

- Any of the above problems last more than two weeks
- Any problem seems especially severe
- Your child has had more than one concussion
- Your child has a more severe injury to the brain (e.g., an injury with bleeding or bruising seen on a CT or MRI scan)

How can you help?

A concussion can be scary and stressful, but most problems will be short-lived. We recommend following these guidelines as your child heals.

- Keep your child safe. It is important your child does not hit his or her head again while healing. Your child will need to take a break from sports and other activities that might cause another head injury. (See “When should young people play sports again?” for more information.)
- Have your child rest. Doing too much too soon after a concussion may worsen problems. In the first days after injury, he or she will probably need more “down time” than usual to rest and relax.
- Make sure your child gets enough sleep and eats properly. Allow daytime naps and make sure your child gets plenty of sleep at night. Also, make sure he or she eats healthy foods and drinks plenty of water.
- Allow extra time to finish things. Some children may be a little slower in how they do things after a concussion. Allow more time than usual to finish tasks.
- Give more chances to learn. Remembering things might be harder for a while. When learning, first make sure your child is paying attention. He or she might also need to hear or see information more times than usual.
- Allow more breaks. Paying attention during hard or boring tasks might be difficult. Have your child take breaks when doing homework and other similar tasks.
- Be patient. Your child might seem cranky, more easily upset, or more tired and forgetful. Be patient and understanding when this happens. If the behavior continues, talk with a doctor.

References:

Children’s Hospital Colorado Sports Medicine
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Medical Society of Sports Medicine