

## Concussion Guide

### 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 I do after a concussion?

A medical doctor should be involved in your care because, in rare cases, severe medical problems occur. Watch your symptoms carefully for the first one to two days after injury. Taking acetaminophen (Tylenol) for headaches is OK, but no other medications should be taken during this time without a doctor’s approval.

Seek IMMEDIATE medical help if you have:

- A severe headache (9-10 out of 10 or feels like the worst headache of your life)
- 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 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 doctor about any symptoms you notice 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/work performance

#### Psychiatric (Behavioral or Emotional)

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

### Where do I 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 work with accommodations and graded return to physical activity should be directed by medical personnel 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
- You have had more than one concussion
- You have a more severe injury to the brain (e.g., an injury with bleeding or bruising seen on a CT or MRI scan)

**How can others help?**

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

- **Stay safe.** It is important you do not hit your head again while healing. You will need to take a break from sports and other activities that might cause another head injury. (See “When should I play sports again?” for more information.)
- **Rest.** Doing too much too soon after a concussion may worsen problems. In the first days after injury, you will probably need more “down time” than usual to rest and relax.
- **Make sure you get enough sleep and eat properly.** Allow daytime naps and make sure you get plenty of sleep at night. Also, make sure you eat healthy foods and drink plenty of water.
- **Allow extra time to finish things.** You may notice you are a little slower in how you 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 you are paying attention. You 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. Take breaks when doing work and other similar tasks.
- **Be patient.** You might feel cranky, more easily upset, or more tired and forgetful. If the behavior continues, talk with a doctor.
- **BIAAZ (Brain Injury Alliance of Arizona)** is a statewide organization in Arizona dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for people with brain injuries and their families and working to prevent brain injuries. They can be contacted at (602) 508-8024 or online at [www.biaaz.org](http://www.biaaz.org).

**References:**

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