

CONCUSSION

What is a concussion?

Head injuries in children are common, especially when they are learning to walk, ride a bike, or engage in sports. Most are mild and do not result in concussion.

A concussion is a brain injury that can affect how a child thinks and remembers. It can occur from a fall, direct blow to the head, neck, or face, or a blow to the body that causes the head to move back and forth. A concussion is “invisible” – it will not show up on an X-ray, CT scan, or MRI.

What are the symptoms and signs of a concussion?

You do not need to lose consciousness to get a concussion!. Symptoms may be unclear in very young children. They may develop shortly after the incident, or may take hours, days, or sometimes months after the injury. Most people recover fully within 7-10 days

Physical Signs

- Headache
- Nausea/vomiting
- Dizziness
- Vision changes
- Loss of consciousness
- Finding lights or noise bothersome
- Loss of balance and/or coordination
- Memory loss

Behaviour Changes

- Irritability
- Sadness
- Anxiety
- Inappropriate emotions or mood swings

Thinking Problems

- Slow reaction time
- Confusion
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty remembering
- Feeling “dazed” or “foggy”

Sleep Difficulties

- Drowsiness
- Trouble falling asleep
- Sleeping more or less than usual

What should I do if my child has symptoms of a concussion?

They should NOT return to playing their sport/game.

They should be evaluated by a doctor that day, as soon as possible

If there is loss of consciousness, go to the hospital or call 911 immediately.
Do not remove sporting equipment (e.g. helmet)

Look for signs or symptoms of a serious brain injury:

Infants

- Poor feeding
- Repeated vomiting o Inconsolable crying o Very drowsy
- Seizures
- Tense bulging of the soft spot on skull (fontanelle)

Older children

- Worsening headache
- Repeated/worsening vomiting
- Strange behaviour
- Trouble with speech, coordination, vision o Seizures

Treatment of Concussions

In the short term- Your child will need to REST and be watched closely for the next 24-48 hours for any changes or worsening of symptoms.

If there are any concerns, take them to the Emergency Department for assessment. The main ongoing treatment for concussion is rest – both physical and mental. This means no exercising, sports, video games, or screen time.

Your child may have to stay home from school because school work can also make symptoms worse.

If the child returns to school or play before symptoms have resolved, the symptoms could get worse or take longer to go away.

Returning to Learning

- A concussion may make it difficult for your child to concentrate at school
- Your child should stay home from school until the worst of the symptoms have resolved, usually over the first few days
- Once they start to feel better, they can try attending half-days. Homework should be limited as well during this time.
- When your child is symptom free with half-days, they can progress to going back to school full time.

Returning to Play

- Your child should NOT return to their sport unless cleared by a doctor
- A second concussion before your child has fully recovered can be very dangerous, and is more likely to happen because their attention, coordination, and reaction time may be off
- Your child can return to physical activity only after they are symptom- free and can attend school (full-days) without any symptoms
- Once they have been seen by a doctor, they can gradually increase their physical activity by progressing through the steps below:
 1. Start with light exercise, like walking for 10-15 minutes
 2. Try a sport-specific but low-risk activity (e.g. skating for hockey, running drills for soccer) for 20-30 minutes
 3. Full practice with no contact

4. Full practice with contact (once cleared by a doctor) o Full game

- Each step must take at least 1 day
- If any symptoms return with activity, they should stop, rest for 24-48 hours again, then see their doctor before starting again

Concussion Prevention

- Certified helmets should be worn for all sports with risk of head injury (cycling, skateboarding, roller-blading, downhill skiing, snowboarding, equestrian) and all contact sports
- Equipment should be well-maintained and properly fitted
- Helmets are not “concussion proof”!
- Good sportsmanship and respecting the rules of play (e.g. no hitting from behind) should be taught in all sports
- Coaches and trainers should teach proper technique including body-checking in hockey, heading in soccer, and tackling in football/rugby to reduce the risk of injury

This handout has been adapted from the Concussion handout found on caringforkids.cps.ca