



Head injury and concussion

Information for parents

What is a head injury and concussion?

A head injury is a knock to the head that can cause pain, bruising or bleeding. Concussion is a type of head injury which causes a temporary change in how the brain works. Concussion can range from mild to life threatening. Most mild concussions get better on their own over a few days.

Concussion signs and symptoms

Concussion symptoms can develop at different times, from immediately following the injury to hours or days later. It is important to keep checking on a young person who has a head injury for 24-48 hours after the injury.

Take your child to a doctor if you think they have concussion. Signs and symptoms of concussion after a head injury include:

Physical symptoms	Thinking and remembering symptoms	Emotional and behavioural symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• headache• nausea and/or vomiting• blurred or double vision• sensitivity to light or noise• dizziness and balance problems• drowsiness, fatigue and sleep difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• difficulty concentrating• slower reaction times• difficulty remembering things, or even forgetting things altogether• feelings of being 'in a fog' or 'slow'	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• greater irritability than usual• anxiety• changes in mood like being sad or even depressed

It's OK to let your child sleep if they want to, but you need to wake them every few hours (even during the night) to check that any concussion symptoms aren't getting any worse.

When urgent medical help is needed

1. **Call an ambulance immediately** on '000' or '112' if using a mobile phone if your child develops any of these symptoms in the 48 hours following the head injury:

- **seizures**
- **slurred speech or**
- **a loss of consciousness (blacking out).**

2. Take your child to hospital if they:

- cannot be woken easily or are very drowsy
- become confused, irritable or delirious
- have an ongoing headache that doesn't get better with paracetamol or develop a stiff neck
- complain of blurred vision, seeing double or have other problems seeing normally
- vomit frequently
- bleed from the ear
- have a watery discharge in the ears or nose, or
- **if you are concerned about their wellbeing, at all.**

Treating concussion

The best treatment for concussion is physical and mental rest. Mental rest means limiting activities that need attention and concentration – for example, video games, texting, reading challenging text, computer work and schoolwork. Try to keep your child's thinking and brain activity low enough so that it doesn't trigger symptoms.

If your child's symptoms don't go away within two weeks, it's important to go back to your doctor for further assessment.

Returning to school after concussion

It's important for your child to **return to school gradually**. For example, your child could start by attending half a day at a time, and then later having a day off during the week if they are getting very tired.

It's also important to let school staff know that your child has had a concussion. This is because your child's concentration, thinking and memory might be affected in the short term. Your child might need some **support at school** to start with, for example:

- adjustments to timetables or classes
- regular, frequent breaks in a quiet place between classes
- extra time for schoolwork and assignments
- help with schoolwork.

During this gradual return to school and normal schoolwork, your child needs to **keep getting as much physical and mental rest as necessary**. This involves:

- not playing any sport, including during breaks at school
- sitting out of active physical education classes
- avoiding activities that risk further injury – for example, bike riding, skateboarding.

Returning to sport after concussion

Your child should return to sport only when they:

- have returned to school full time
- have returned to normal levels of thinking
- can cope with schoolwork and light-to-medium exercise without concussion symptoms getting worse
- are on a supervised return to play protocol.

A **return to play protocol** is a slow, gradual return to physical exercise after concussion. It generally involves the following steps:

1. Get enough physical and mental rest until symptoms go away.
2. Start light aerobic exercise, like walking or swimming.
3. Do simple sports drills and exercises with no risk of head impact – for example, running, side steps or bouncing a ball.
4. Try more complex non-contact drills and exercises – for example, weaving, catching and passing. Light weight training can also start again now.
5. Make a return to full-contact sport practice, **only after medical clearance from a doctor**.
6. Return to normal, full-contact game play.

Your child must have no symptoms at each step before they move on to the next step. There should be at least 24 hours between each step. It can take some time for your child to be completely back to normal after a concussion, but it is important their recovery isn't rushed.

(Main source: Raising Children Network; Concussion 5-18 year olds)

