

Facts about Concussion- Information for Parents/Guardians

What is a concussion?

A concussion occurs when there is trauma to the head. With a concussion, there is no bleeding in the brain but there are changes in the brain chemistry that can often lead to symptoms. You do not have to be "knocked out" or unconscious to have a concussion. Usually symptoms are most intense for several days after the injury and gradually improve over time. Although everyone is different in terms of which symptoms they have after injury, the most common symptoms following concussion are:

1. **Headache.** The headache is most often experienced in the frontal part of the head behind the eyes and in the temporal (side) region of the skull. Many people report that they have a sense of "pressure" in their head. These headaches may be accompanied by nausea and vomiting, light and noise sensitivity, and light-headedness or dizziness. These headaches are often made worse by either physical exercise or by activities that demand concentration and memory (such as reading or doing computer work).
2. **Difficulty focusing or a feeling of "fogginess."** Some people experience a general slowing down in their ability to think and have difficulty doing mental tasks, particularly for the first week or two after the injury.
3. **Memory loss (amnesia)** for events that happened just before or just after the blow to the head.
4. **Temporary confusion** after the injury.
5. **Fatigue or extreme tiredness.** Many people have an increased need for sleep following concussion. This is a normal part of the recovery process. It is also common for patients to experience disruption of sleep during the night and have difficulty falling sleep, even though they are very tired.
6. **Disruption of balance.** Some people who experience a concussion have a temporary disruption of balance and feel unsteady on their feet.

How long does it take to recover from a concussion?

The time that it takes to recover from a concussion depends on a number of factors including the severity of the injury, past history of concussions and past history of headaches. However, most people recover within one to three weeks of the injury and have no long term difficulties. If your symptoms last longer than several weeks, you should be evaluated by a neurological specialist, or by a physician who specializes in sports medicine.

Headache Management Following Concussion

Post-concussion headaches are one of the most common symptoms that occur following a concussion. These headaches can be quite severe and are often described as being the "worst headache ever." Fortunately, these types of headaches are usual-

ly time limited and resolve spontaneously with rest. These headaches can be persistent and make take weeks to resolve. Recovery is usually more rapid if immediately after the injury the athlete rests sufficiently.

- The headaches are often experienced as a sense of "pressure" in the head.
- Traditional over-the-counter pain medications such as Tylenol® may or may not provide any relief. Although effective in patients with a history of migraine headaches, prescription medication such as Imitrex® and Maxalt® may not provide relief. Aspirin products should be avoided, especially in children.
- Headaches may become more intense throughout the day, particularly if the athlete is involved in school activities.

Activities that may make the headache worse include

- Physical exertion such as walking, running, or working out. This is secondary to an increase in the heart rate of the athlete.
- Cognitive exertion from school work, reading, video games, or excessive television viewing.
- Driving.
- Attending loud sporting events.
- Intake of alcohol.
- Excessive caffeine intake.

Methods for minimizing the headache include

- Rest as much as possible.
- Do not rush back to activities.
- Avoid physical activities such as running and weightlifting.
- Refrain from sporting activities, both attending and participating.
- Younger athletes should be held out of recess.
- It is often helpful to take several days off school when the headaches are severe.
- When the headache becomes severe, rest in a dark, quiet room.

Parents should alert school staff that their child may need to rest in the office or nurse's station if the headaches increase during the school day.

This sheet is meant to serve only as a guide. Please consult your physician for treatment.