

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CONCUSSION

In the Clinic
Annals of Internal Medicine

What Is a Concussion?

A concussion is a common type of brain injury that can happen when you hit your head directly or have whiplash. This could happen during sports or other recreational activities. It can also happen after a fall or car accident. If you think you have a concussion, see a doctor as soon as possible. Concussions are especially risky for children because their brains are still developing.

What Are the Symptoms?

Some symptoms might start right after the injury, including:

- Headache
- Dizziness
- Feeling sensitive to light and noise
- Trouble balancing
- Trouble seeing
- Feeling sick or vomiting
- Confusion or lack of awareness of surroundings

Some symptoms might show up days or weeks later. These could include:

- Headache or head pressure
- Getting tired easily
- Feeling lightheaded
- Ringing in the ears
- Having trouble remembering things
- Anxiety or depression
- Changes in sleep

How Is It Diagnosed?

- If the injury seems severe, do not move the person. If he or she has lost consciousness or is having convulsions, call 911 immediately.
- If you think you have a concussion, you should seek medical care.
- The medical evaluation will include a physical and neurologic (head and brain) examination. This can include asking you questions and having you do things like follow a moving object with your eyes. In the emergency setting you may also get an imaging test called a CT scan to check the brain for more serious injury.

How Is It Treated?

- A concussion is usually treated initially with rest followed by a gradual return to full activities. Most people feel better within a couple of weeks to a month. Some symptoms may linger for a few months. Talk to your doctor if you have concerns.
- Take it easy initially and do not undertake activities that are too difficult or strenuous. You might need to occasionally give your brain and eyes a break from activities that



- need a lot of focus. This might mean taking off from work or school or taking breaks during work or school. Ask your doctor how much rest you need and what activities you can do.
- If you have a concussion and want to start playing sports again, ask your doctor when it's OK for you to return.
- If you have a headache, ask your doctor what medicines you can use.
- Some people find that melatonin helps them sleep better during a concussion. Ask your doctor if this is right for you.

How Can It Be Prevented?

- The best way to prevent a concussion is to avoid risky activities, like contact sports (for example, ice hockey or football). If you can't avoid those activities, you might consider changing the rules of the activity, such as playing touch football instead of tackle football and not allowing body checking in ice hockey. Be sure to wear a helmet and mouth guard while playing sports where that type of protective equipment is required.
- It's important to know about risks for concussion and how to treat them.
- If you get a concussion, it's very important to give yourself time to get better. This means not participating in any risky activities until you are healed. Becoming injured again before complete recovery from a concussion can have grave consequences. Ask your doctor when it's OK for you to return to your activities.

Questions for My Doctor

- When can I go back to school or work?
- What can I do during the day while I'm recovering?
- What medicines can I take for the pain?
- Is it OK if I go to sleep?
- How long will it be until I feel better?
- Is it safe for me to play sports?

For More Information



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury/symptoms.html
MedlinePlus
<https://medlineplus.gov/concussion.html>