

Guidelines for Suspected Head Injuries and Concussions

What is a concussion?

A concussion is a type of brain injury that changes the way the brain normally works. A concussion is caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head. Concussions can also occur from a blow to the body that causes the head and brain to move rapidly back and forth. Even what seems to be a mild bump to the head can be serious.



What are the signs and symptoms of a concussion?

You can't see a concussion. Signs and symptoms of concussions can show up right after an injury or may not appear or be noticed until hours or days after the injury. It is important to watch for changes in how the student is acting or feeling, if symptoms are getting worse, or if s/he just "doesn't feel right." Most concussions occur without loss of consciousness.

Signs of a Concussion
Appears dazed or stunned
Is confused about events
Answers questions slowly
Repeats questions
Can't recall events prior to the hit, bump, or fall
Loses consciousness (even briefly)
Shows behavior or personality changes
Forgets class schedule or assignments
Slurred speech
One pupil (the black part in the middle of the eye) is larger than the other

Symptoms of a Concussion	
Thinking/Remembering:	Emotional:
Difficulty thinking clearly	Irritable
Difficulty concentrating or remembering	More emotional than usual
Feeling more slowed down	Sad
Feeling sluggish, hazy, or groggy	Nervous
Physical:	Sleep*:
Headache or "pressure" in head	Drowsy
Nausea or vomiting	Sleeps <i>less</i> than usual
Balance problems or dizziness	Sleeps <i>more</i> than usual
Blurry or double vision	Has trouble falling asleep
Sensitivity to light or noise	
Numbness or tingling	*Only ask about sleep symptoms if the injury occurred on a prior day.
Does not "feel right"	

Know how to assess consciousness:

It is important to know whether or not the victim is conscious, as the victim needs special positioning if unconscious, paying particular attention to breathing. To check the consciousness of the victim, try the AVPU code:

- **A** - is the victim *alert*? - are your questions being answered? (What happened to you?) Instruct a responsive patient to remain still. Look for any obvious injuries to the head.
- **V** - does the victim respond to *voice*? - give spoken commands or ask questions (What is today's date?)
- **P** - does the victim respond to *pain* or touch? - pinch skin to see if there is movement or eyes opening
- **U** - is the victim *unresponsive* to anything attempted?

What should I do if someone has a concussion?

Suspect a brain injury when a blow to the head results in confusion or disorientation. Activate EMS immediately and provide spinal motion restriction. Do not try to stop the flow of blood or fluid from the ears or nose. If the injured has a seizure, maintain spinal motion restriction and protect them from bumping into nearby objects. Do not restrain them tightly and do not place anything in their mouth. Seizures generally last for just a few minutes. Seek medical attention right away. A health care professional experienced in evaluating for concussions can determine how serious the concussion is and when it is safe to return to normal activities, including physical activity and school (concentration and learning activities).

Concussion Treatment	
1. Prevent Swelling and Further Injury	
a.	Apply ice wrapped in a washcloth to the bumped area.
b. Have the person stop activity and rest.	
c. Never let a concussed person out of your sight until medical attention arrives.	
2. When to Seek Medical Attention	
a.	When their headache seems to be getting worse
b. Continued vomiting	
c. Increased drowsiness or dizziness	
d. Increased confusion	
e. Heart palpitations, seizures, or loss of consciousness	
f. Neck pain after fall	



Make sure the injured individual talks to their physician about concussions. Each concussion is different and how to treat them can be different, too. It is a very individualized plan based on the diagnosis and conversations with the physician.

Concussions in Sports

Concussions have been called the 'silent epidemic'. The Centers for Disease Control says about 3 million young athletes suffer from sports related concussions each year, but there are concerns that many more are not being diagnosed. If left untreated, some concussion symptoms can lead to a lifetime of problems.

California has implemented a new concussion safety law:

Education Code 49475, formerly Assembly Bill 25, addresses concussion in high school athletics and was recently signed into law by the Governor. This is a measure the CATA (California Athletic Trainers' Association) sponsored last year and supported this year, with the NFL being the primary sponsors. The new state law is fundamentally similar to the CIF (California Interscholastic Federation) rule that came into play last year. It states:

"This bill requires a school district that elects to offer athletic programs to immediately remove from a school-sponsored athletic activity for the remainder of the day an athlete who is suspected of sustaining a concussion or head injury during that activity. The bill would prohibit the return of the athlete to that activity until he or she is evaluated by, and receives written clearance from, a licensed health care provider, as specified. The bill would require, on a yearly basis, a concussion and head injury information sheet to be signed and returned by the athlete and the athlete's parent or guardian before the athlete's initiating practice or competition."