

# CARING FOR Your Child's Concussion

Your child was seen today for a concussion. Use this handout to help you watch for changes in how your child is feeling or acting, and to help your child feel better.

## WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

A concussion is a type of traumatic brain injury from a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body that causes:



The head and brain to move quickly back and forth.



The brain to bounce or twist in the skull from this sudden movement.



Chemical changes in the brain, and sometimes stretching and damage to the brain cells.

## HOW WILL MY CHILD FEEL?

Concussion symptoms may appear during the normal healing process, and will generally improve over time. Most people with a concussion feel better within a couple of weeks. Some symptoms may appear right away, while other symptoms may not appear for hours or days after the injury. Your child may not realize they have some symptoms until they try to do their usual activities. You may notice changes before your child does. If there are any symptoms that concern you, or are getting worse, your child may need immediate care. Be sure to talk with your child's doctor.



☒ Schedule a follow up appointment with your child's doctor.

### Here are symptoms your child may have:



#### PHYSICAL

- Bothered by light or noise
- Dizziness or balance problems
- Feeling tired, no energy
- Headaches
- Nausea or vomiting (early on)
- Vision problems



#### THINKING OR REMEMBERING

- Attention or concentration problems
- Feeling slowed down
- Foggy or groggy
- Problems with short- or long-term memory
- Trouble thinking clearly



#### SOCIAL OR EMOTIONAL

- Anxiety or nervousness
- Irritability or easily angered
- Feeling more emotional
- Sadness



#### SLEEP

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

# WHAT STEPS CAN I TAKE TO HELP MY CHILD FEEL BETTER?



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## REST RIGHT AFTER THE INJURY

**Take it easy the first few days after the injury when symptoms are more severe.**

- Early on, limit physical and cognitive (thinking or remembering) activities to avoid causing symptoms to worsen.
- Get a good night's sleep, and take naps during the day as needed.
- Find relaxing activities at home (such as reading, drawing, and playing with toys). Avoid activities that put your child at risk for another injury to the head and brain throughout the course or recovery.

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## WITHIN A FEW DAYS

**As your child starts to feel better (and within a few days after the injury), he or she can gradually return to regular (non-strenuous) activities.**

- Return to school gradually. If symptoms do not worsen during an activity, then this activity is OK for your child. If symptoms worsen, cut back on that activity until it is tolerated.
- Encourage outside time, such as taking short walks.
- Get maximum nighttime sleep. **Tips:** Avoid screen time and loud music before bed, sleep in a dark room, and keep to a fixed bedtime and wake up schedule.
- Reduce daytime naps, or return to a regular daytime nap schedule (as appropriate for their age).

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## WHEN SYMPTOMS ARE NEARLY GONE

**When symptoms are mild and nearly gone, return to most regular activities.**

- Have your child take breaks if their concussion symptoms worsen.
- Return to a regular school schedule.
- Encourage outside time, such as taking a walk or short bike ride and playground time.

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## BACK TO REGULAR NON-SPORTS ACTIVITIES

**Recovery from a concussion is when your child is able to do all of their regular activities without experiencing any concussion symptoms.**

- If you notice any changes or a return of symptoms, be sure to contact your child's doctor.
- With the OK from their doctor, your child may begin a return to sports process. Be sure to ask for instructions and share this information with your child's coach and athletic trainer (when available).

### Other tips:

- Ask your child's doctor about over-the-counter or prescription medications that are safe to take during recovery to help with symptoms (for example, ibuprofen or acetaminophen for headaches).
- Limit the number of soft drinks or caffeinated items to help your child get enough rest.

# WHEN CAN MY CHILD RETURN TO SCHOOL?

Your child may need to take a short time off from school (or work, if relevant). Ask the doctor for written instructions about when your child can safely return to school, work, and other activities, such as riding a bike or driving a car.

For a short time after a concussion, your child may need support, such as:



**Rest breaks**



**Fewer hours at school or work**



**More time to take tests or complete tasks**



**Less screen time and time spent reading and writing**

If your child is having a difficult recovery, talk with your child's school or employer about support services that may be available. For most people, only short-term changes or support services are needed as they recover from a concussion.

If symptoms persist, talk with your child's doctor about formal support services they recommend. If the injury was work-related, make sure your child reports it right away to their employer and their workers' compensation office.



# WHEN CAN MY CHILD RETURN TO SPORTS AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES?

Your child should **not** return to sports and recreational activities:



On the same day of the injury.

AND



Until they get the OK from a doctor with experience evaluating concussion.

Ask your child's doctor for written instructions about when your child can safely return to sports. Getting approval from a doctor to return to play is important since playing with a concussion may slow recovery. A repeat concussion that occurs before the brain has fully healed can increase the chance for long-term problems.

While rare, teens are at greater risk of suffering a severe brain injury when a repeat concussion occurs before the brain has fully healed. It can even be fatal.

Your child's doctor should carefully manage and monitor the process of returning to sports and activities. When available, the athletic trainer for your child's sports program or school should be involved.

## WHAT IF I DON'T FEEL LIKE MY CHILD IS GETTING BETTER?



If you do not feel like your child is getting better, talk with his or her doctor. Keep track of your child's concussion symptoms, and share them with the doctor. This may help the doctor identify the best treatment for your child's symptoms. You may also need to take your child to see a specialist experienced in treating brain injuries. Ask your child's doctor for names of brain injury specialists in your area.

## WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF A MORE SERIOUS BRAIN INJURY?

**After your child's concussion, call 9-1-1 if your child develops:**

- A headache that gets worse and does not go away
- Significant nausea or repeated vomiting
- Unusual behavior, increased confusion, restlessness, or agitation
- Drowsiness or inability to wake up
- Slurred speech, weakness, numbness, or decreased coordination
- Convulsions or seizures (shaking or twitching)
- Loss of consciousness (passing out)



## WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT CONCUSSION?

Information in this handout is based on *CDC's Guideline on the Diagnosis and Management of Mild Traumatic Brain Injury Among Children*. More information on the Guideline and concussion, as well as tips to help your child feel better, information about returning to school, and the return-to-play process can be found at [www.cdc.gov/HEADSUP](http://www.cdc.gov/HEADSUP).

*The information provided in this handout is not a substitute for medical or professional care. Questions about diagnosis and treatment for a concussion should be directed to your child's healthcare provider.*



# How Can I Help My Child Recover After a Concussion?



**CDC HEADS UP**  
SAFE BRAIN. STRONGER FUTURE.

This handout describes common concussion symptoms your child may experience, and tips you can use to help with their recovery.



Most children with a concussion, a type of traumatic brain injury, feel better within a couple of weeks. However, for some, symptoms will last for a month or longer. Concussion symptoms appear as part of the normal healing process and may change as your child gets back to his or her regular activities. **If there are any symptoms that concern you, or are getting worse, be sure to seek medical care as soon as possible.**



## CONCUSSION RECOVERY TIPS

Making short-term changes to your child's daily activities can help him or her get back to a regular routine more quickly. As your child begins to feel better, you can slowly remove these changes. Use your child's symptoms to guide his or her return to normal activities. If your child's symptoms do not worsen during an activity, then that activity is OK for them. If symptoms worsen, your child should cut back that activity.

It is important to remember that each concussion and each child is unique, so your child's recovery should be customized based on his or her symptoms. Factors that may delay recovery include your child having: a history of a previous concussion or other brain injury, neurological or mental health disorders, learning difficulties, or family and social stressors.

## QUICK TIPS



**Ensure your child avoids activities that can put him or her at risk for another injury to the head and brain.**



**Help your child keep a positive attitude. Most children with a concussion feel better within a couple of weeks.**



**Ensure your child gets enough rest.**

# CONCUSSION RECOVERY TIPS

The chart below lists concussion symptoms your child may experience, and tips to address each symptom. Many of the tips can help with more than one symptom. These tips offer temporary changes you can make to help your child's recovery.



## PHYSICAL

Concussion Symptoms	How Your Child May Feel or Act	Tips to Help with Your Child's Recovery
Headaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trouble with concentration</li> <li>• Increased irritability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore setting up school rest breaks (in a quiet place)</li> <li>• Shorten school day if symptoms do not get better</li> <li>• Lessen the amount of time your child uses screens (computers, tablets, smartphones, etc.) if these activities make symptoms worse</li> <li>• Give your child ibuprofen or acetaminophen to help with pain (if approved by their doctor)</li> </ul>
Bothered by light or noise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Symptoms worsen in bright or loud environments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have your child wear sunglasses or a hat when outside, or when exposed to bright lights or sunlight</li> <li>• Lessen the amount of time your child uses screens (computers, tablets, etc.) if these activities make symptoms worse</li> <li>• Help your child avoid noisy/crowded places. If needed, your child can wear earplugs or headphones</li> </ul>
Dizziness or balance problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unsteady when walking</li> <li>• Nausea or vomiting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take steps to avoid a fall that could put your child at risk for another injury to the head or brain during their recovery</li> <li>• Avoid crowded areas</li> </ul>
Feeling tired	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of energy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shorten school day if symptoms do not get better</li> <li>• Provide rest breaks in a quiet place at school, or at home during the day, as needed</li> </ul>



## THINKING OR REMEMBERING

Concussion Symptoms	How Your Child May Feel or Act	Tips to Help with Your Child's Recovery
Attention or concentration problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Only able to focus on school work for short amounts of time</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Shorten tasks</li><li>Break down tasks into smaller activities or steps</li><li>Lessen school workload or amount of activity</li><li>Avoid cognitive activities (thinking or remembering) that can cause symptoms to worsen</li></ul>
Short-term memory problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Trouble remembering instructions or keeping information and ideas in mind during tasks</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Repeat directions or key information</li><li>Provide written notes</li></ul>
Long-term memory problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Trouble with learning new information or remembering information already learned</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Repeat directions or key information</li><li>Provide reminders, or tie information to familiar things, such as: events, objects, or people</li><li>Break down information into smaller chunks or pieces</li></ul>
Feeling slowed down	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Unable to keep pace with workload</li><li>Slower reading, writing, or calculation</li><li>Difficulty processing verbal information effectively</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Talk with your child's school about extending deadlines to complete homework, assignments, and tests</li><li>Reduce or slow down how quickly information is presented and check for understanding throughout the activity</li></ul>
Foggy or groggy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Less mental energy</li><li>Trouble thinking clearly</li><li>Trouble formulating thoughts</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Provide rest breaks during activities throughout the day (at school or home)</li><li>Set aside a quiet place at home for school work or other learning activities</li></ul>



## SOCIAL OR EMOTIONAL

Irritability or easily angered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Trouble dealing with stress</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Look for opportunities to lessen the amount of stress your child may feel</li><li>Provide a place for your child to take quiet rest breaks, as needed</li><li>Do deep breathing exercises with your child</li><li>Encourage your child to talk to a trusted adult or friend</li><li>Remind your child that most people feel better soon after a concussion</li></ul>
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Concussion Symptoms	How Your Child May Feel or Act	Tips to Help with Your Child's Recovery
Anxiety or nervousness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Worried about falling behind, or pressure to ignore symptoms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Talk with your child's school about extending time to complete homework, assignments, and tests</li> <li>Help your child stay positive (most children with a concussion feel better within a couple of weeks)</li> </ul>
Sadness or withdrawal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Withdrawal from school or friends because of stigma or activity restrictions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Give your child time to talk with and stay connected to friends</li> <li>Help your child stay connected to teammates, even if he or she is not participating</li> <li>Talk with your doctor if depression is worrisome</li> </ul>



## SLEEP

Sleeping more than usual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hard to wake up, shifted sleep schedule</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore setting up a later school start time</li> <li>Allow for rest breaks during the day, as needed</li> <li>Keep to a set bedtime routine with fixed sleep and wake up times as much as possible</li> </ul>
Sleeping less than usual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Irritable, lack of energy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Avoid screen time and loud music right before bed</li> <li>Sleep in a dark, cool room</li> <li>Keep to a set bedtime routine with fixed sleep and wake up times as much as possible</li> </ul>
Trouble falling asleep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tired, groggy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limit daytime naps or return to your child's regular daytime nap schedule (as appropriate for their age)</li> <li>Keep to a set bedtime routine with fixed sleep and wake up times as much as possible</li> </ul>



## WHAT IF MY CHILD ISN'T GETTING BETTER?

Talk with your child's doctor if you do not feel like your child is getting better. Your child may need to see a specialist who has experience treating brain injuries. Ask your child's doctor for the names of brain injury specialists in your area.

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