A FACT SHEET FOR

Parents

CDC HEADS UP
SAFE BRAIN. STRONGER FUTURE.



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. Concussions can have a more serious effect on a young, developing brain and need to be addressed correctly.

What are the signs and symptoms of a concussion?

You can't see a concussion. Signs and symptoms of concussion 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 your child or teen 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.

If your child or teen reports one or more of the symptoms of concussion listed below, or if you notice the signs or symptoms yourself, seek medical attention right away. Children and teens are among those at greatest risk for concussion.

Signs & Symptoms of a Concussion

Signs Observed by Parents or Guardians

- Appears dazed or stunned
- Is confused about events
- Answers questions slowly
- Repeats questions
- Can't recall events *prior* to hit, bump, or fall
- Can't recall events *after* hit, bump, or fall
- Loses consciousness (even briefly)
- Shows behavior or personality changes
- Forgets class schedule or assignments

Symptoms Reported by Your Child or Teen

Thinking/Remembering

- Difficulty thinking clearly
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering
- Feeling more slowed down
- Feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy

Physical

- Headache or "pressure" in head
- Nausea or vomiting
- Balance problems or dizziness
- Fatigue or feeling tired
- Blurry or double vision
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Numbness or tingling
- Does not "feel right"

Emotional

- Irritable
- Sad
- More emotional than usual
- Nervous

Sleep*

- Drowsy
- Sleeps *less* than usual
- Sleeps *more* than usual

**Only ask about sleep symptoms if the injury occurred on a prior day.*

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Danger Signs

Be alert for symptoms that worsen over time. Your child or teen should be seen in an emergency department right away if she or he has one or more of these danger signs:

- One pupil (the black part in the middle of the eye) larger than the other
- Drowsiness or cannot be awakened
- A headache that gets worse and does not go away
- Weakness, numbness, or decreased coordination
- Repeated vomiting or nausea
- Slurred speech
- Convulsions or seizures
- Difficulty recognizing people or places
- Increasing confusion, restlessness, or agitation
- Unusual behavior
- Loss of consciousness (even a brief loss of consciousness should be taken seriously)

Children and teens with a suspected concussion should NEVER return to sports or recreation activities on the same day the injuried occurred.

They should delay returning to their activities until a healthcare provider experienced in evaluating for concussion says it's OK to return to play. This means, until permitted, not returning to:

- Physical Education (PE) class
- Sports practices or games
- Physical activity at recess

What should I do if my child or teen has a concussion?

1. **Seek medical attention right away.**
   A healthcare provider experienced in evaluating for concussion can determine how serious the concussion is and when it is safe for your child or teen to return to normal activities, including physical activity and school (concentration and learning activities).
2. **Help them take time to get better.**
   If your child or teen has a concussion, her or his brain needs time to heal. Your child or teen may need to limit activities while s/he is recovering from a concussion. Exercising or activities that involve a lot of concentration, such as studying, working on the computer, or playing video games may cause concussion symptoms (such as headache or tiredness) to reappear or get worse. After a concussion, physical and cognitive activities—such as concentration and learning—should be carefully managed and monitored by a healthcare provider.
3. **Talk to your child or teen about how they are feeling.**
   Your child may feel frustrated, sad, and even angry because s/he cannot return to recreation and sports right away, or cannot keep up with schoolwork. Your child may also feel isolated from peers and social networks. Talk often with your child about these issues and offer your support and encouragement.

How can I help my child return to school safely after a concussion?

Most children can return to school within a few days. Help your child or teen get needed support when returning to school after a concussion. Talk with your child's teachers, school nurse, coach, speech-language pathologist, or counselor about your child's concussion and symptoms.

Your child's or teen's healthcare provider can use CDC's Letter to Schools to provide strategies to help the school set up any needed supports.

As your child's symptoms decrease, the extra help or support can be removed gradually. Children and teens who return to school after a concussion may need to:

- Take rest breaks as needed
- Spend fewer hours at school
- Be given more time to take tests or complete assignments
- Receive help with schoolwork
- Reduce time spent reading, writing, or on the computer
- Sit out of physical activities, such as recess, PE, and sports until approved by a healthcare provider
- Complete fewer assignments
- Avoid noisy and over-stimulating environments

To learn more, go to www.cdc.gov/HEADSUP or call 1.800.CDC.INFO

January 2021

A FACT SHEET FOR

High School Parents

CDC HEADS UP
SAFE BRAIN. STRONGER FUTURE.

This sheet has information to help protect your teens from concussion or other serious brain injury.

What Is a Concussion?

A concussion is a type of traumatic brain injury—or TBI—caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or by a hit to the body that causes the head and brain to move quickly back and forth. This fast movement can cause the brain to bounce around or twist in the skull, creating chemical changes in the brain and sometimes stretching and damaging the brain cells.

How Can I Help Keep My Teens Safe?

Sports are a great way for teens to stay healthy and can help them do well in school. To help lower your teens' chances of getting a concussion or other serious brain injury, you should:

- Help create a culture of safety for the team.
  - Work with their coach to teach ways to lower the chances of getting a concussion.
  - Emphasize the importance of reporting concussions and taking time to recover from one.
  - Ensure that they follow their coach's rules for safety and the rules of the sport.
  - Tell your teens that you expect them to practice good sportsmanship at all times.
- When appropriate for the sport or activity, teach your teens that they must wear a helmet to lower the chances of the most serious types of brain or head injury. There is no "concussion-proof" helmet. Even with a helmet, it is important for teens to avoid hits to the head.

How Can I Spot a Possible Concussion?

Teens who show or report one or more of the signs and symptoms listed below—or simply say they just "don't feel right" after a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body—may have a concussion or other serious brain injury.

Signs Observed by Parents

- Appears dazed or stunned
- Forgets an instruction, is confused about an assignment or position, or is unsure of the game, score, or opponent
- Moves clumsily
- Answers questions slowly
- Loses consciousness (even briefly)
- Shows mood, behavior, or personality changes
- Can't recall events *prior to* or *after* a hit or fall

Symptoms Reported by Teens

- Headache or "pressure" in head
- Nausea or vomiting
- Balance problems or dizziness, or double or blurry vision
- Bothered by light or noise
- Feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy
- Confusion, or concentration or memory problems
- Just not "feeling right," or "feeling down"

Talk with your teens about concussion. Tell them to report their concussion symptoms to you and their coach right away. Some teens think concussions aren't serious or worry that if they report a concussion they will lose their position on the team or look weak. Remind them that *it's better to miss one game than the whole season.*

GOOD TEAMMATES KNOW:
IT'S BETTER TO MISS ONE GAME THAN THE WHOLE SEASON.

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CONCUSSIONS AFFECT EACH TEEN DIFFERENTLY.

While most teens with a concussion feel better within a couple of weeks, some will have symptoms for months or longer. Talk with your teens' healthcare provider if their concussion symptoms do not go away or if they get worse after they return to their regular activities.

Plan ahead. What do you want your teen to know about concussion?

What Are Some More Serious Danger Signs to Look Out For?

In rare cases, a dangerous collection of blood (hematoma) may form on the brain after a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body and can squeeze the brain against the skull. Call 9-1-1, or take your teen to the emergency department right away if, after a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body, he or she has one or more of these danger signs:

- One pupil larger than the other
- Drowsiness or inability to wake up
- A headache that gets worse and does not go away
- Slurred speech, weakness, numbness, or decreased coordination
- Repeated vomiting or nausea, convulsions or seizures (shaking or twitching)
- Unusual behavior, increased confusion, restlessness, or agitation
- Loss of consciousness (passed out/knocked out). Even a brief loss of consciousness should be taken seriously



What Should I Do If My Teen Has a Possible Concussion?

As a parent, if you think your teen may have a concussion, you should:

1. Remove your teen from play.
2. Keep your teen out of play the day of the injury. Your teen should be seen by a healthcare provider and only return to play with permission from a healthcare provider who is experienced in evaluating for concussion.
3. Ask your teen's healthcare provider for written instructions on helping your teen return to school. You can give the instructions to your teen's school nurse and teacher(s) and return-to-play instructions to the coach and/or athletic trainer.

Do not try to judge the severity of the injury yourself. Only a healthcare provider should assess a teen for a possible concussion. You may not know how serious the concussion is at first, and some symptoms may not show up for hours or days. A teen's return to school and sports should be a gradual process that is carefully managed and monitored by a healthcare provider.

Teens who continue to play while having concussion symptoms or who return to play too soon—while the brain is still healing—have a greater chance of getting another concussion. A repeat concussion that occurs while the brain is still healing from the first injury can be very serious, and can affect a teen for a lifetime. It can even be fatal.

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