

MANAGING YOUR CONCUSSION

What Is a Concussion?

A concussion is an injury to the brain caused by a blow to the head, or by hitting the head on another object. It may result in loss of consciousness or confusion. It may also cause amnesia (loss of memory) about the event related to the concussion as well as time before or after.

What Causes a Concussion?

Sudden movement of the brain in the skull can injure the brain. Most concussions result from motor vehicle accidents, industrial accidents, contact sports (such as football and hockey), falls, and physical attacks.

What Are the Symptoms of a Concussion?

Symptoms include temporary unconsciousness, short-term amnesia, dizziness, headache, confusion, mild lack of coordination, nausea, vomiting, and being unable to concentrate. Symptoms usually last for hours to several days.

How Is a Concussion Diagnosed?

The health care provider makes a diagnosis from a detailed neurological examination and history of loss of consciousness, amnesia, or confusion after a blow to the head. The health care provider may order computed tomography (CT) or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) of the brain to rule out a brain hemorrhage, but these tests usually show normal findings.

How Is a Concussion Treated?

Treatment consists of rest and careful observation, usually at home. First symptoms of a concussion mimic those of a head injury with bleeding into the brain. If symptoms get worse or

don't improve, swelling or bleeding inside the skull needs to be ruled out by your physician with additional tests.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing a Concussion

- ✓ **DO** take medicines such as acetaminophen for headache.
- ✓ **DO** eat a light diet. For nausea, eat mostly small amounts of food or fluids.
- ✓ **DO** get plenty of rest until you feel normal. Ask your health care provider about when you may return to work or may exercise. An ice pack to the spot that was hit may help with pain.
- ✓ **DO** watch for increasing confusion, worsening headache, drowsiness, loss of coordination, loss of memory, nausea, vomiting, muscle weakness, problems walking, unequal pupils, convulsions, and inability to wake from sleep. These signs mean a worsening condition and could mean an emergency.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you don't improve in about 24 hours.
- ✓ **DO** prevent head injuries: always wear a seat belt in a motor vehicle. Always use helmets when riding a motorcycle. Use protective gear in sports and limit contact sports activities.
- ✓ **DO** avoid another concussion. Repeated concussions (especially within 3 months) may cause permanent brain damage and even death. Don't play football or hockey, box, or practice martial arts until your health care provider gives you permission to resume these activities.

⊗ **DON'T** stay alone. Someone should check on you every couple of hours for the first 24

hours or until you feel normal.

⊗ **DON'T** take medicines or substances that cause drowsiness or changes in level of

consciousness. These include narcotic pain medicines, alcohol, sleeping pills, muscle relaxants, tranquilizers, and recreational drugs. They may mask important symptoms of a worsening condition.

⊗ **DON'T** eat a heavy diet. It may lead to vomiting.

⊗ **DON'T** do strenuous activities. You may get a more severe headache. Don't operate

dangerous machinery. Being dizzy or having decreased muscle coordination, ability to concentrate, or memory may make operation of machinery dangerous.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- Brain Injury Association of America (formerly the National Head Injury Foundation):
Tel: (800) 444-6443; Website: <http://www.biausa.org>
- American Trauma Society: Tel: (800) 556-7890; Website: <http://www.amtrauma.org>

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