

Concussion Information for Parents

Organized sports provide our children with special opportunities for character building and physical development. Particularly in the contact sports, these opportunities come with risks. While we want our children to be able to play hard, learn to push ahead through adversity and be successful, we first want them to be safe. Each season in football, soccer, hockey, wrestling, lacrosse and rugby up to 10% of a team's players will suffer concussions. These injuries are also common and just as serious in basketball, baseball, diving, and other sports.

What is a concussion?

A concussion is a mild traumatic brain injury. Concussions are usually caused by direct impact to the head but can also occur from a blow to the body that sends whiplash forces to the brain.

Does a concussion have to involve loss of consciousness?

No. Most concussions do not. In fact, athletes will often continue playing in spite of these injuries, sometimes making concussions difficult to detect at first.

How do I know if my son or daughter has had a concussion?

Any athlete who has had a concussion will have had a blow to the head or body and will show some of the following symptoms:

PHYSICAL

- Headache, dizziness, nausea
- Visual changes such as double or blurry vision, flashing lights, unusual colors
- Balance problems
- Drowsiness, fatigue, sleep difficulties
- Trouble tolerating light or noise

COGNITIVE

- Confusion, disorientation or feeling mentally "foggy"
- Feeling "slowed down" in thinking

- Trouble focusing and concentrating
- Forgetfulness or poor short-term memory
- Word-finding problems

EMOTIONAL

- Irritability
- Unusual moodiness
- Sadness
- Nervousness or anxiety
- Depression
- Some of these symptoms will appear immediately after the blow. Some may quickly disappear while other symptoms can increase or develop in the hours or days after the injury.



What should I do if my son or daughter has had a concussion?

- Obtain medical consultation. Athletes who have been unconscious, even briefly, should be taken to a hospital or doctor's office for evaluation to rule out conditions such as bleeding in the brain or fractures. For concussions not involving loss of consciousness, families will usually call their child's primary care doctor right away to report symptoms and status. Your doctor will then advise you as to whether your child should be seen in a hospital Emergency Department, at the doctor's office, or monitored at home.
- REST is the main treatment for a concussion in the initial phase. Taking a break from physical exercise and cutting back enough in school work to keep symptoms from flaring up will facilitate recovery.
- Make sure your child receives proper evaluation by a specialist who understands current thinking and practices in sports concussion management.

How long will symptoms last?

In mildest cases, symptoms last only minutes to hours. For athletes who have taken a more severe blow or who have had multiple or other recent concussions, symptoms may last for weeks or even months.

Will my son or daughter recover completely from a concussion?

Most athletes who have had concussions recover fully and can safely go back to their regular sports activity IF the injury is identified right away and they are managed well until they are fully recovered. Athletes who have had too many concussions or who return to play too soon may risk significant problems.

What are the risks of returning to play too soon after a concussion?

The most common risk is causing symptoms that would clear up quickly to be prolonged for weeks or months. Athletes who have had more concussions and return too soon also risk developing long lasting or even permanent symptoms.

When is it safe for my son or daughter to return to sports action after a concussion?

Concussion experts agree that no athlete should be back playing a contact sport while they still have any symptoms. The athlete should also be fully back to normal functioning in school and everyday life activities. Assessments of cognitive functioning, ocular-vestibular functioning, and balance should be normalized as well. Ultimately the final decision for your son or daughter to return to contact sports activity is made by your doctor and concussion care specialist based upon your child's history, their recovery from the recent concussion, and the sport to which they wish to return.

Can a concussion affect my child's school performance?

Yes. Many of the symptoms listed above can make it difficult for your child to do as well as usual in school. This may be a problem only for a few days in milder cases. In more severe concussions trouble with headaches, concentration, fatigue, etc. may persist for weeks or months

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and cause trouble with focusing and remembering in class, homework, and exams. Students with extended symptoms will benefit from office consultation, which allows a closer look at their academic difficulties and specific school accommodations that can help during their recovery. Many student athletes say or think they are fully recovered when they are still symptomatic. This usually happens because they don't want to miss playing time or let their team and coach down or perhaps because they don't understand the risks of returning to action too soon. Office consultation allows a closer look at your child's recovery and can facilitate a safer return to their sport.

What is the value of neuropsychological testing like ImPACT®?

ImPACT® is a very sensitive test that helps to measure recovery of cognitive functions such as memory, attention, and speed of thinking that are typically affected by a concussion. Use of ImPACT® testing while your child is still recovering from symptoms and again when he or she feels symptom-free helps determine if his or her thinking skills are back to where they should be. Cognitive testing of this kind has become the standard in most professional sports and provides extra assurance that an athlete is ready to return to the risks of contact sport activity

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