

What is a concussion?

A concussion is a brain injury.

It is caused by an impact or forceful motion to the head or body that causes the brain to move inside the skull. Most concussions do not show up on a regular CT or MRI. You can have a concussion without losing consciousness. Falls, motor vehicle collisions, playing sports or being struck by an object or person are common causes of concussion.

Only a medical doctor or nurse practitioner can diagnose a concussion.

When in doubt, sit them out!

Red Flags

Seek immediate medical attention if you have worsening of symptoms.

The following are some warning signs to watch for that may indicate a more serious injury:

- Weakness or tingling/burning in arms/legs
- Severe or increasing headache
- Seizure or convulsion
- Loss of consciousness or deteriorating conscious state
- Increased confusion (cannot remember new events, recognize people or places)
- Continual fluid or bleeding from the ear or nose
- Sudden or severe vomiting
- Increasingly restless, agitated, or combative behaviour
- Slurred speech or difficulty speaking
- Double vision
- Change in behaviour (acting strange, saying things that don't make sense)

Symptoms to Watch For

Everyone's concussion experience is different. A concussion can affect all parts of life, including going to school or work, participating in physical activity, and taking part in your day-to-day and family activities.

Concussion symptoms can appear right away, but sometimes may not be noticed until hours or days later. Concussions can affect how you think and feel, your mood and sleep. The following are examples of common symptoms you may experience after a concussion:

THINKING

- Difficulty concentrating or paying attention.
- Taking longer to think and feeling in a fog.
- Having difficulty finding words.
- Having trouble remembering.
- Having a short tolerance for conversations, activities, & busy places.

EMOTIONAL

- Feeling more sensitive, emotional or sad.
- Feeling irritable, angry or frustrated.
- Having a short fuse or lower tolerance.
- Feeling nervous or anxious.

PHYSICAL

- Headache, dizziness or balance problems.
- Nausea or vomiting.
- Blurred or double vision.
- Sensitivity to light or noise.
- Feeling fatigued – having low energy or tiring more easily.
- Feeling slowed down.

SLEEP

- Sleeping more or less than you normally would.
- Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep.

The First Few Days of Recovery

DO rest for the first 24-48 hours. Limit screen time and keep social visits brief.

DO gradually add light physical and cognitive activities when symptoms start to improve, like walking or reading. Keep activities brief (~30 minutes) and take regular breaks.

DO conserve your energy so your brain can fully recover. If symptoms return or you get new ones, it is a sign you are pushing too hard.

DO take care of basic needs; eat well and regularly. This can improve your mood, sleep and mental focus.

DO stay away from stimulants (coffee, caffeine, energy drinks, etc.), which can put added stress on your brain.

DO manage stress and emotional upset that can make your symptoms feel worse. Try to do things that help you relax and feel calm.

DON'T be "woken up" every hour. In the first 24 hours you should have someone available to check on you, but they do not need to wake you. Increased sleep is normal and necessary.

DON'T avoid all activity. Light physical and cognitive activity are important to the healing process.

DON'T immediately return to full-time work or study. The demands of work and school can trigger symptoms.

DON'T return to contact sports or higher risk activities until you have discussed a return-to-activity plan with your health care provider.

DON'T drive, ride a bike, or work with machinery or ladders until your doctor or nurse practitioner says it's okay; reaction time, vision, and thinking may be affected by your concussion.

DON'T use non-prescription drugs (including alcohol); this may add to symptoms and increase recovery time.

Concussion Management & Recovery

Everyone's timeline for concussion recovery is different.

Recommendations for recovery include a short period of rest followed by a gradual return to activity. Start by doing just a little at a time. Take rests and give yourself extra time to get things done. Most people feel better after four weeks - if you are experiencing prolonged symptoms, it is important to follow up with your physician or nurse practitioner and closely monitor your symptoms. Referrals to other allied health professionals may help with specific symptoms - look for health professionals with experience in evidence-based concussion treatment.

Most people get better after a concussion and go back to their normal activities.

Prevention & Reducing Risk

When you are recovered from concussion you should protect your brain from another injury. Use safety equipment that fits properly including seatbelts, car and booster seats. Use protective sports gear and a properly fitted helmet appropriate to the activity. Adhere to the rules of the sport or activity and respect all participants. Helmets can't prevent a concussion, but they may reduce its severity and can prevent other serious injuries, like skull fractures.

For more resources, please visit:

<https://braininjuryns.com/concussions>

