



**Staff, please note that the
Head Injury Routine is
included on page 3.**

Concussion in adults

This booklet explains what can happen after a concussion, how to get better and where to go for more information and help if needed. It does not replace follow-up with your family doctor. This information is for people aged 16 and older.

Research shows that people who get information, feel better because they know what to expect. Education about your symptoms and support from others can improve your recovery.

If you have any questions regarding your recovery, see your family doctor.

This booklet does not replace medical advice.

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Important information for the first 24 hours after the injury ...

Information for patients

You have had an injury to your head with concussion. The doctors have examined you and determined that it is safe for you to go home now. In the next 24 hours there could still be changes in your condition that might need treatment.

The people who are with you have been asked to watch you and make sure that you come back to the hospital if you are not well.

Headache is common after a concussion. Avoid taking painkillers or any medication containing ASA (aspirin) during the first 24 hours after the injury unless prescribed by a doctor.

See your family doctor within 24 hours for follow-up.

Other instructions: _____

Date: _____

Information for family and friends

In the next 24 hours, the injured person may develop serious complications that would need urgent hospital treatment.

You will need to observe the injured person often during this time, including waking them up every 2 hours overnight to check for:

- inability to arouse (hard to wake up)
- a headache that gets worse (especially deep throbbing headache) or dizziness
- nausea or vomiting 2 or more times
- tremors or convulsions (uncontrolled shaking or writhing movements)
- slurred speech
- increased confusion, restlessness or agitation
- fluid leaking from the nose or ear
- weakness, numbness or decreased coordination

If the person has any of the above, take him or her right away to the closest Emergency or call 911.

What is a concussion?

A **concussion** is a change in mental state that results from a blow or jolt to the head. This type of an injury is also called:

- a closed head injury
- a mild head injury
- a mild brain injury

After a concussion, some people lose consciousness or are "knocked out" for a short time. However, you can also have a concussion without losing consciousness.

A blow or jolt to the head can cause the brain to move inside the skull and upset its normal function. This blow to the head can occur in a motor vehicle collision, a fall, contact sports, when the skull is struck by a blunt or heavy object, or in other ways. Sometimes whiplash can cause a concussion.

When the head gets hit, the brain sometimes bruises or swells. If the blow to the head is severe enough, the long thin nerve fibres in the brain can snap or break and the blood vessels can tear and bleed. Bruising recovers with time. Swelling can take longer to go down. Nerves can recover and blood vessels heal like any cut will. However, the bruising, swelling, snapped nerves and broken blood vessels cause the symptoms after a concussion.

The brain is very complex and every injury is different. Some symptoms appear right away, while others may show up days or weeks after the concussion. Sometimes the injury makes it hard for people to be aware of or admit they are having problems.

The signs of concussion are not always very clear to see. Signs may be missed early on by patients, family members or doctors. A person with a concussion may look fine but act or feel different.

What are the symptoms of a concussion?

Someone who has had a concussion may have physical complaints, changes in their behaviour or 'thinking' problems. These symptoms are usually temporary, but may last for days, weeks or even longer.

Generally, if you feel that 'something is not quite right' or you 'feel foggy', talk with your family doctor.

You may have one or more of these symptoms:

- Headache (that may get worse with exercise)
- Having more trouble than usual:
 - remembering things
 - concentrating/paying attention
 - organizing every day activities
 - making decisions
 - problem solving
- Changes in mood
 - feeling sad, anxious, or restless
 - becoming easily frustrated or angry
 - low motivation
- Change in sleep pattern
 - sleeping longer than usual
 - trouble falling asleep
 - waking often through the night
- More sensitive to:
 - noise
 - lights
- Lack of energy, always feeling tired
- Feeling dizzy or light-headed
- Poor balance
- Slowed thinking and reactions
- Easily confused
- Neck pain
- Blurred vision
- Change in sense of smell or taste
- Ringing in the ears
- Change in sex drive
- 'Foggy' thinking

Symptoms vary from person to person. You may find that you have more symptoms when you do a demanding activity.

After 4 or 5 days most people feel a lot better. If you do not think that you have recovered within 14 days of the injury, see your family doctor.

How long will it take to recover?

After a concussion, you may not feel completely back to normal again for 1 to 2 weeks. Because all concussions are different, so is the recovery. Most people recover fully, but it can take time. Some symptoms can last for days, weeks or longer.

How quickly you improve depends on many factors. These factors include how severe your concussion was, your age, and how healthy you were before the concussion. In general, recovery is slower for people over 40 years of age and for people who have had a concussion before.

If you already had a medical problem at the time of your concussion, it may take longer for you to recover. Anxiety and depression may also make it harder to adjust to the symptoms.

While you are recovering, be very careful to avoid doing anything that could cause a blow or jolt to your head. On rare occasions, having another concussion before the first has healed can be fatal.

Rest is very important after a concussion because it helps the brain to heal. You will need to be patient because healing takes time. Return to daily activities, such as work or school, at your own pace. As the days go by, you can expect to gradually feel better.

Even after your concussion has healed, you should protect yourself from having another concussion. People who have had repeated concussions, such as boxers or football players, may have serious problems later in life. These problems include difficulty with concentration and memory and sometimes with physical coordination.

Tips for recovery

- Get plenty of sleep at night, and rest during the day.
- Return to your normal activities gradually, not all at once.
- Talk with your family doctor about when you can return to work or school. Ask about ways to help your employer or teacher understand what has happened to you.
- Consider talking with your employer about returning to work gradually and changing your work activities until you recover.
- Avoid activities that could lead to a second concussion, such as contact sports, until your doctor says that you are well enough to take part in these activities.
- Ask your family doctor when you can drive a car, ride a bike, or operate heavy equipment because your ability to react may be slower after a concussion.
- Take only those medications that your family doctor has approved.
- Don't drink alcoholic beverages until your family doctor says that you can. Alcohol and certain drugs may slow your recovery and put you at risk of further injury.
- If it is harder than usual to remember things, then write them down.
- Be prepared that your recovery pattern will not always be smooth. At times you may feel that you are slipping backwards. This is normal and does not mean that you are not recovering.

When can I drive?

It is unsafe for you to drive for at least 24 hours after the injury. Your reactions may be slower for several more days. Do not drive until you are free from symptoms. Then, start with caution and avoid long trips and heavy traffic. Ask your family doctor about when you can drive.

When can I return to work?

If you feel extremely tired, have difficulty concentrating or do not feel like yourself, it is better to stay off work for a few days. Once you feel able to return to work, try going back part-time for a few days, if possible.

What about legal issues?

If your injury was caused by a motor vehicle collision, call your motor vehicle insurer within 7 days to let them know of your injury.

Where to get help

For urgent medical issues, go to your local Emergency Department. The Emergency Room doctor may refer you to the:

Adult Concussion Clinic
Hamilton General Hospital
Phone: 905-527-4322, ext. 46755

For non-urgent medical concerns, see your family doctor.

For general information about concussions, recovery and rehabilitation services, contact the Acquired Brain Injury Program (ABIP), Hamilton Health Sciences. Phone: 905-521-2100, ext. 74101

Contacts for more information

Local: • Your family doctor

Ontario: • Ontario Brain Injury Association (OBIA)

PO Box 2338

St. Catharines, ON L2R 7R9

Phone: 905-641-8877

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