

Head Injury and Concussion

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

Information for patients

You have had an injury to your head. The doctors have examined you and decided that it is safe for you to go home.

In the next 24 hours there could still be changes in your condition that might need treatment.

Your friends or family have been asked to watch you and make sure that you come back to the hospital if you are not well. Another adult should watch you closely for at least 24 hours.

People who have had a head injury often have headaches. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) and ibuprofen (Advil) can help. Do not take ASA (Aspirin) for 24 hours after your concussion.

Other instructions: _____

Date: _____

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Information for family and friends

Please carefully watch your family member or friend for the next 24 hours.

Look for these problems:

- You cannot wake the patient up. The patient seems very sleepy.
- The patient has a headache that gets worse.
- The patient vomits two or more times.
- The patient is shaking or having convulsions (fits).
- The patient is hard to understand when he or she is talking.
- The patient seems confused. The patient cannot sit still or seems upset.
- There is fluid coming from the nose or ear.
- The patient is stumbling or feeling weak or numb.
- The patient is acting strange or saying things that do not make sense.
- The patient cannot remember conversations or things that happened.

If he or she has any of the above problems, please bring him or her back to the Emergency Department or call 911.

The rest of this booklet is for people who have been diagnosed with a concussion. It explains what can happen after a concussion. It also tells how to get better and where to go for help and information. You still need to see your family doctor after your concussion.

Researchers know that people who get information about their concussion feel better. They know what to expect. Knowing about your concussion and getting support from your family, friends, and doctors can help you get better faster.

If you have more questions about your concussion, you should see your family doctor.

This booklet does not replace talking to your doctor.

What is a concussion?

A concussion is an injury that happens when there is a blow or jolt to the head. This is also called a closed head injury, mild head injury, or mild brain injury.

A blow to the head can happen in a car accident, a fall or a sports tackle. It can happen if something heavy hits the head, or in other ways. Sometimes, whiplash causes a jolt to the head.

After a concussion, some people lose consciousness or are "knocked out". You can also have a concussion without being knocked out.

A blow or jolt to the head can cause the brain to move inside the skull. The brain can bruise or swell. A bad blow to the head can cause nerves in the brain to snap or break. Blood vessels can tear and bleed. Nerves can get better. Blood vessels can heal like a cut does. Bruises and swelling get better in time. The bruising, snapped nerves, and broken blood vessels cause the symptoms of a concussion.

Every concussion is different. Sometimes symptoms appear right away. Other times, they may show up days or weeks after the concussion. The signs of concussion are not always clear to see. Patients, family members or doctors may miss them. A person with a concussion may look fine but act or feel different.

Sometimes the concussion makes it hard for people to know or admit they are having problems.

What are the symptoms of a concussion?

Someone who has had a concussion may have physical problems, changes in their behaviour or thinking problems. These problems may last for days, weeks or even longer.

After your concussion, you may have some of these symptoms:

- Headache. Your headache may get worse if you exercise.
- Neck pain.
- Trouble remembering things, concentrating, or paying attention. Your thinking may be slow. You may feel confused or foggy.
- Trouble being organized, making decisions, and solving problems.
- Sad, nervous or restless feelings. You may feel frustrated or angry.
- Sleeping longer than usual. You may also have trouble falling asleep and wake up often during the night.
- You may find that noise hurts your ears and light hurts your eyes.
- Feeling tired.
- Feeling dizzy or light-headed. You may have trouble with your balance.
- Slow thinking. You may be easily confused.
- Change in sex drive.

Symptoms vary from person to person. Your symptoms may be worse when you do a demanding activity.

How is a concussion treated?

The most important treatment for a concussion is REST.

Rest helps the brain to heal. For the first 24 to 48 hours after a concussion, you should rest from physical and cognitive (thinking) activities. Resting your brain mean not reading, working on the computer, watching television, or using your smart phone. You should take time off of work or school.

If you go back to physical or thinking activities before your brain is ready, your symptoms may be worse or last longer. Before returning to school or work, check with your family doctor.

Healing takes time. Go back to daily activities, such as work or school, at your own pace. As the days go by, you will start to feel better.

Even after your concussion has healed, you should protect yourself from having another concussion.

People who have had many concussions, such as boxers or football players, may have serious problems with thinking and moving later in life.

How long will it take to recover?

It may take 1 or 2 weeks for you to feel completely back to normal. Most people start to feel better after 2 or 3 days.

How quickly you get better depends on many factors. A bad concussion can take longer to heal. If you were healthy before your concussion, you will heal more quickly. It takes longer for people over 40 years of age to feel better. It also takes longer to feel better if you 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 feel better. Anxiety and depression can make it harder to adjust to the symptoms.

While you are recovering, be 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 cause death.

When can I return to exercise and sports?

Please see your doctor before returning to work or sports.

Rest from physical and thinking activities until your symptoms are gone. Then, return to work or school bit by bit. Once you are back at work or school, follow the steps below. Do not return to exercising or sports until your symptoms are gone.

Graduated Return to Play Protocol

Step	Activity
1	Complete rest. Once you are back to normal (free of symptoms) and have seen your family doctor, go to step 2
2	Light exercise like walking or an exercise bike, for 10 to 15 minutes. No weight training.
3	Sport-specific aerobic activity (for example skating and hockey, running and soccer), for 20 to 30 minutes. No body contact or jarring movements (like hitting a baseball).
4	“On field” practice like ball drills, shooting drills and other activities with NO CONTACT (for example no checking, no heading the ball). See a doctor before going to Step 5.
5	“On field” practice with body contact, once your doctor says it is okay.
6	Game play.

Note: Each step must take at least one day. If you have any symptoms of a concussion (see list on page 3), STOP activity, wait 24 to 48 hours, and start again at the previous step.

When can I drive?

Do not drive for at least 24 hours.

Your reactions may be slower for several more days. Do not drive until you do not have symptoms. Then, start carefully. Avoid long trips and heavy traffic. Ask your family doctor about when you can drive.

Tips for recovery

- Sleep lots at night. Rest during the day.
 - Return to your normal activities bit by bit, 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.
 - Talk with your employer about returning to work bit by bit and changing your work activities until you recover.
 - Do not exercise or play sports until your symptoms have completely gone and you have seen your family doctor.
 - Ask your family doctor when you can drive a car, ride a bike or operate heavy equipment. Your reactions may be slower after a concussion.
 - Only take medications that your doctor has approved.
 - Do not drink alcohol until your family doctor says that you can. Alcohol and drugs may slow your recovery and put you at risk of further injury.
 - If it is harder than usual to remember things, write them down.
 - Know that getting better does not always happen smoothly. You may feel you are slipping backwards. This is normal and will get better with time.
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What about legal issues?

If your injury was caused by a car accident, call your insurance company within 7 days and tell them about your injury.

Where to get help

For urgent medical problems, go to the Emergency Department.

The Emergency Room doctor may send you to the:

Adult Concussion Clinic
Hamilton General Hospital
Phone: 905-521-2100, ext. 46755

If it is not an emergency, see your family doctor.

For information about concussions, recovery and rehabilitation services, contact:

Acquired Brain Injury Program (ABIP)
Hamilton Health Sciences
Phone: 905-521-2100, ext. 74101

For more specific information about returning to sport or exercise after a concussion, speak with your family doctor.

You can also visit “Parachute Canada” online at www.parachutecanada.org/resources for additional information (previously “ThinkFirst”).

Contact for more information

Local:

Your family doctor

Ontario:

Ontario Brain Injury Association (OBIA)

PO Box 2338

St Catharines, Ontario

L2R 7R9

Phone 905-641-8877
 or toll free in Canada 1-800-263-5404

Web Site: www.obia.on.ca

E-mail: obia@obia.on.ca
