What You Need to Know About Concussions
Concussion and Head Injury

A concussion is a mild traumatic brain injury that can occur after a direct blow to the head or other blow to the body that can cause an impulsive force. You do not have to be knocked unconscious to have a concussion. Signs and symptoms of a concussion can vary from person to person; no two concussions are alike even in the same person. Sometimes symptoms don't show up until days after the original trauma.

Head injuries are among the most feared of all sports injuries. The majority of concussions (80%) recover in a short period of time (3 weeks); however it usually takes longer for children and adolescents. The potential for serious injury is always present. The following recommendations can help prevent a seemingly minor injury from becoming a life-threatening one.

- If a concussion is suspected, the athlete should be removed from play (practice or game) immediately and not return the same day of injury. Remember, many signs and symptoms are delayed in presenting, especially among youth and adolescents.
- Seek an evaluation from a qualified healthcare provider who is trained in the evaluation and management of concussion.

Why Be Concerned About Concussions?

Most athletes with a concussion will recover fully, with no long-term effects. However, for some individuals, signs and symptoms of a concussion can last for weeks or even longer. If an athlete has a concussion, his or her brain needs time to heal. A repeat injury that occurs before the brain fully recovers from the first — usually within a short time period (hours, days, weeks) — can prolong recovery and/or increase the chances for long-term problems. In rare cases, repeat concussions can result in permanent brain damage or can even be fatal.

The Facts

- A concussion is a brain injury.
- All concussions are serious.
- Most concussions occur without loss of consciousness.
- Concussions can occur in any sport or activity.
- Recognition and proper management of concussions when they first occur can help prevent further injury or even death.
- A concussion is typically associated with normal structural imaging findings (CT Scan, MRI).
Prevention and Preparation

Insist that safety comes first. To help minimize the risks for concussion or other serious brain injuries:

• Ensure that athletes follow the rules for safety and the rules of the sport.
• Encourage good sportsmanship at all times.
• Wearing a helmet is crucial to reduce the risk of severe brain injury and skull fracture. However, helmets are not designed to prevent concussions. There is no “concussion-proof” helmet.

Check with your league, school or district about concussion policies. It is recommended that parents and athletes receive yearly education about concussions and sign a concussion policy statement at the beginning of the athlete’s season.

Concussion policy statements can be developed to include:

• The school or league’s commitment to safety
• A brief description of concussion
• Information regarding when athletes can safely return to school and play

What Should I Do When a Concussion is Suspected?

Follow the action plan below for guidance on how to respond:

1. Remove an athlete with a suspected concussion from play immediately.
2. Ensure that the athlete is evaluated by an appropriate healthcare professional as soon as possible.
3. Inform the athlete’s parents or guardians about details of the injury.
4. Do not allow the athlete to return to play until he/she has been cleared by an appropriate healthcare professional and written clearance documentation has been provided.

Signs and Symptoms

Observed by You (Coaching Staff, Parent, etc.)

• Appears dazed or stunned
• Is confused about assignment or position
• Forgets an instruction
• Is unsure of game, score or opponent
• Moves clumsily
• Answers questions slowly
• Loses consciousness (even briefly)
• Shows mood, behavior or personality changes
• Can’t recall events prior to hit or fall
• Can’t recall events after hit or fall

Reported by Athlete

• Physical
  » Headache
  » Sensitivity to Light
  » Sensitivity to Noise
  » Nausea
  » Vomiting
  » Neck Pain

• Cognitive
  » Attention/Concentration Problems
  » Short-term Memory Problems
  » “Fogginess”
  » Feeling Slowed Down

• Sleep
  » Fatigue
  » Difficulty Sleeping
  » Sleeping More Than Normal
  » Drowsiness

• Affective
  » Increased Emotionality
  » Irritability
  » Sadness
  » Anxiety/Stress
What Are Concussion Danger Signs?

Call 9-1-1 or take the athlete to the Emergency Department right away if, after a bump, blow or jolt to the head or body, the athlete exhibits one or more of the following danger signs:

- One pupil larger than the other
- Drowsiness or inability to be awakened
- Worsening headache
- Weakness, numbness or decreased coordination
- Repeated vomiting or nausea
- Slurred speech
- Convulsions or seizures
- Inability to recognize people or places
- Disorientation, increased restlessness or agitation
- Unusual behavior
- Loss of consciousness (even a brief loss of consciousness should be taken seriously)

Guidelines for Concussion Management:

- Always follow directions from your pediatrician or primary care provider.
- Throughout the day, check in with child for breathing rate, heart rate, skin color and other symptoms. Unless specifically instructed to do so, you do NOT need to wake the person up repeatedly.
- Limit food consumption to a light diet and clear liquids for 2 – 4 hours following injury.
- Limit over-the-counter painkillers, unless prescribed by a medical practitioner.
- Encourage mental and physical rest. Academic accommodations may be necessary if the individual has difficulty in school.
- Avoid electronic devices, computers, mobile devices, texting, etc. as these may make symptoms worse.
- A child should be able to return to school first, before extracurricular activities.
- If there is any question about your athlete’s well-being, seek medical attention immediately.

Treatment and Recovery from Concussion

Although most athletes who have a concussion will recover within several weeks, some may have persistent symptoms that require further evaluation and frequent visits with a physician or concussion specialist. Coordination with a concussion management team is critical to the recovery of the athlete. Stamford Health’s Concussion Center is led by a neuropsychologist who not only evaluates an individual’s symptoms but also administers neurocognitive testing, which is an integral component of concussion management. The Concussion Center also coordinates care with schools as academic accommodations may be needed, and should be handled on an individual basis.

Once an athlete returns to school/work and is symptom-free at rest, the athlete will be advised when to start a step wise progression of physical activity. Most progressions involve five stages that should be completed under the supervision of a healthcare professional, for example your team’s certified athletic trainer. At a minimum, there should be at least 24 hours between each stage, and not completed in one day.

If an athlete’s symptoms return or new symptoms develop when becoming more active at any stage, this is a sign that the athlete is pushing too hard. He/she should stop these activities and contact their healthcare provider. After more rest and no concussion symptoms, the athlete may return to the previous step and continue with the progression program.

To make an appointment or for more information, call 203.276.4123.
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