

Concussion in children

Emergency Department factsheets



What is a concussion?

A concussion occurs after a strong blow to the head or significant shaking and the brain has been injured. Concussion is a brain injury.

What causes a concussion?

The skull and facial bones are hard and they protect the brain, which is soft. When someone has a knock to the head, their brain moves about and can hit the inside of the skull and facial bones.

Most of the time the injury to the brain is not visible on CT scan.

What are the symptoms?

A person with a concussion will experience some form of symptoms, even if only for a few seconds. Some people are confused about where they are and what has happened. Other symptoms may affect ability to think, walk, talk, remember things, or their balance. Vomiting, headaches, photophobia (pain with bright lights), and in some cases seizures (convulsions) may also occur.

These symptoms will vary, depending on how the injury happened.

It is common to have a headache, nausea, vomiting and mild dizziness or sleepiness.

Treatment

While in the emergency department, the patient will be closely monitored and may have:

- mild painkillers for headache or pain
- the person may be fasted – nothing to eat or drink until further advised
- anti-nausea medication for any nausea or vomiting

- a CT scan of the brain, neck or bones (if needed)
- an x-ray of the neck if there is neck pain or a suspicion of neck injury (if needed)
- if the injury is mild, they will be sent home with family or friends. Please ask for a certificate for work if needed.

Instructions

The staff who have examined your child, did not find any serious brain or skull injuries, but it is possible for more serious symptoms to develop later on.

- Rest quietly for the day.
- Use ‘ice packs’ over swollen or painful areas. To do this wrap ice cubes, frozen peas or a sports ice pack in a towel. Do not put ice directly on the skin.
- Your child may be in discomfort. Give paracetamol every 4-6 hours to relieve pain if required. Check the packet for correct dose and only use as directed. Do not give ibuprofen (as it can encourage bleeding or bruising). Aspirin should never used in children.
- Do not let them take sedatives or other medication unless instructed.
- Your child should be observed by someone responsible (parent, teacher, or carer) for the next 24 hours looking for any of the signs/symptoms in the “Return immediately” section below.

Return to school

- You will have received a separate ‘Returning to school & sport’ factsheet.
- In most cases, after no more than a few days of rest, your child should gradually increase their daily activity level as long as their symptoms do not worsen.
- If symptoms persist for more than a week or they worsen, see your general practitioner.

Return to sport

- You will have received a separate ‘Returning to school & sport’ factsheet.
- Many sporting codes have guidelines on returning to sport. Your code will likely have one on their websites; your general practitioner will need to fill in the paperwork.
- **Do not return to sport until all symptoms have gone.** This is because reaction times and thinking will often be slower, putting your child at risk of further injury. Another head injury before fully recovering from the first, can result in catastrophic brain swelling and death.

Return immediately

If the patient develops any of the following:

- unconsciousness or undue drowsiness
- frequent vomiting
- severe headache or dizziness that continues
- convulsion or fit or spasms of the face or limbs
- unusual or confused behaviour
- difficult to wake up
- weakness of the arms or legs
- abnormal or unsteady walking
- slurred speech
- blurred or double vision
- bleeding or discharge from ear or nose
- if you have any other concerns.

What to expect

Many people cannot remember events before or after their head injury (amnesia).

It can take some time for the brain to recover. During this time headaches and mild cognitive problems (such as difficulty concentrating, remembering things, performing complex tasks, and mood changes) are common. It is also normal to feel more tired than usual.

Most people make a full recovery and the symptoms last only a few days. There is no specific treatment other than plenty of rest.

Some people will have ongoing problems. If this

is the case, see your local doctor or health care provider.

Seeking help

In a medical emergency, go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call an ambulance (dial 000).

For other medical problems see your local doctor or health-care professional.

13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) provides health information, referral and teletriage services to the public in all parts of Queensland and is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year for the cost of a local call*.

*Calls from mobile phones may be charged at a higher rate. Please check with your telephone service provider

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