

Minor head injury

Emergency Department factsheets

What is a minor head injury?

Minor head injury is when the injury is small enough so there was no anatomical damage to the brain and often used interchangeably with concussion.

This advice sheet is a reminder to look out for delayed signs of injury which were not present at the time of your visit, as occasionally problems can develop later. If you are concerned, you should seek medical advice.

You had a head injury that has been assessed and does not require admission. Although there was no evidence of serious brain or skull injury when you were seen, just occasionally slow bleeding or other problems can occur later.

You should be observed by someone responsible and do not drive for the next 24 hours, looking for any of the signs/symptoms listed in the "Return immediately" section below.

What are the symptoms?

In a minor head injury there are very few symptoms. Usually there has been a bump, a laceration (cut) on the head or face. These have been examined by the doctor and separate advice has been given about wounds or bruising to the skin.

Instructions for the next 24-48 hours

Headache

- You may be in discomfort. Have paracetamol every 4-6 hours to relieve pain if required. Check the packet for correct dose and only use as directed.

- Do not use aspirin or anti-inflammatory pain relievers such as ibuprofen or naproxen which may increase the risk of complications.
- 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.

Vomiting

- You may vomit one or two times in the first hour or two after the injury. If the vomiting continues, return to the emergency department.

Drowsiness

- You may be sleepy. There is no need to keep awake if you want to sleep.

Drinking and drugs

- Avoid drinking alcohol or taking sleeping pills or recreation drugs as they can make you feel worse and also make it hard for other people to tell whether the injury is affecting you or not.

Sport

- You should not return to sport until you have been cleared by your general practitioner.

Return immediately

Return to the emergency department immediately if you develop any of the following:

- frequent vomiting
- severe or persistent headache or dizziness
- convulsion or fit or spasms of the face or limbs
- unusual or confused behaviour
- restlessness, drowsiness
- difficult to wake up
- weakness of the arms or legs
- abnormal or unsteady walking, poor coordination

- slurred speech
- double or blurred vision
- or if you are worried for any reason.

Problems to watch out for in the next few days to weeks

In the next few weeks talk to your doctor if you notice:

- irritability
- mood swings
- tiredness
- concentration problems
- behavioural changes.

These may signify a persisting mild traumatic brain injury (concussion). Most people with minor concussion make a full recovery. Talk to your doctor about managing these symptoms and how to help you return to normal activities.

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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