

Concussion

What is a concussion?

A concussion is an injury to your brain. It happens when the brain shakes rapidly in the skull. You can get a concussion even if your head isn't injured directly. Concussions often happen after hitting your head, being in a car crash, or getting a sporting injury.

What are the symptoms?

The most common symptom is a headache. Blacking out after a concussion isn't common. Other common symptoms include:

- Dizziness and balance problems
- Nausea and vomiting
- Confusion
- Concentration and memory problems
- Feeling sluggish or foggy
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Sleep problems

When should I see my doctor?

You should see your doctor after a head injury if you have any of the symptoms listed above. You should see your doctor right away or go to the emergency room if you have bad headaches, repeated vomiting, difficulty using your arms or legs, or worsening sleepiness or confusion.

How is it diagnosed?

There is no one test that can diagnose a concussion. Your doctor will ask you about your head injury and your symptoms. Your doctor will also test your strength, balance, reflexes, and memory. If your doctor thinks you have a more serious injury, imaging tests of your brain may be needed.

How long does it last?

Symptoms usually go away in three to 10 days. It may take longer in children, teenagers, and people who have had a concussion before.

How is it treated?

The most important treatment is rest, both physical and mental, so that the brain can heal. You should not do any heavy activity, like aerobic exercise or weight lifting, until your doctor tells you it's okay. Mental rest means avoiding things that require a lot of focus, like playing video games, text messaging, and watching television, until your symptoms are gone.

There are no medicines to cure a concussion. Although your doctor may recommend over-the-counter pain medicine to help relieve symptoms like headaches, some medicines

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aren't safe to take. Always ask your doctor before taking medicine the first few days after a concussion.

When can I return to playing sports?

If it's possible that you might have a concussion, you should stop playing immediately. Continuing to play while you have a concussion can lead to serious injury.

Your doctor and your coach will work together to decide when it is safe for you to return to your sport. When you no longer have any symptoms of concussion, they will help you gradually return to your normal level of play.

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

AAFP's Patient Education Resource

Web site: <http://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/diseases-conditions/concussion.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/headsup/index.html>, and <http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/headsup/youth.html>

PubMed Health

Web site: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001802/>

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Notes:

This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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