

Head Injury


A concussion is a mild brain injury resulting from a jarring of the brain following a head injury. Head injuries can result from: a direct blow to the head, a hit to the upper body, or a rapid accelerating/decelerating force on the body. These forces cause the brain to move inside the skull. Concussion symptoms can occur even without a loss of consciousness (fainting/black out) and can last minutes or hours to days and months.

Concussions are a brain injury that will not be seen on xrays, CT scans or MRIs. They can affect the way a child may think, behave and remember things.



Key Points

- Concussions are a minor traumatic brain injury following an impact on the head or upper body
- Children with concussions can have lots of different symptoms – the most common are headaches, dizziness, nausea and difficulty concentrating
- Allowing your child’s brain to rest and recuperate is the best treatment for concussions. It is recommended that your child slowly return to school and sports after a short time of quiet rest
- Most children recover from their concussion in two weeks. If your child has symptoms for more than a month, they should be referred to a specialist
- For detailed information on concussion symptoms and how to help your child return to school and activities, see these [Concussion Guidelines](#)

 Seek Immediate Medical Attention if:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your child has a severe, worsening headaches • Your child has a seizure • Your child is complaining of weakness, numbness or tingling to a part of their body • Your child has sudden worsening confusion or changes to their behavior • Your child is difficult to wake up or very drowsy • Your child has lots of vomiting and looks more tired/unwell after throwing up • Your child has sudden changes to their vision

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Symptoms

The signs (seen by others) and the symptoms (felt by the person) of a concussion can be hard to notice. Symptoms may start hours or rarely, days later. A concussion can cause one or more of the following:

Early symptoms of concussion:

- Headache
- Dizziness
- Vertigo (spinning) or imbalance
- Lack of awareness
- Loss of consciousness
- Nausea and vomiting

Late symptoms of concussion:

- Staring
- Slow to answer questions
- Inability to focus or concentrate
- Disorientation
- Confusion
- Memory loss (amnesia)
- Slurred speech
- Behavioral or mood changes
- Light or noise sensitivity
- Fatigue or sleep disturbance
- Ear-ringing
- “Seeing stars” or vision changes
- Blurred vision
- Poor balance or coordination

Very young children may show the following signs:

- Decreased interest in feeding/nursing
- Loss of learned skills (ie: toilet training)
- High pitched cry or more difficult to settle

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Treatment

A concussion is a serious event but most children can recover fully if their brain is given time to rest and recuperate. Returning to regular activities like school and sport is a step-by-step process that requires patience and caution.

A 'Return to Learn' followed by a 'Return to Play' system is recommended for children with concussions. This means they should start with going back to school and doing 'mental work', before they go back to physical activities.

- It is recommended your child take complete rest for one to two days following their injury. They should avoid any activities, including going to school, watching television, taking a walk or reading a book
- After the first few days of rest, your child should begin to 'Return to Learn'. This means a slow return to school and homework. Your child's teachers should know about the concussion. Your child may need some extra help with assignments, or a quieter workspace to complete their tests.
- Once your child can attend school without any concussion symptoms, they can start a gradual return to sports and activities.

How Long do Concussions Last?

The length of time a child will experience concussion symptoms can be quite variable. Most children will recover within one to two weeks, especially if they follow brain rest and activity rest guidelines that are recommended.

Some children will experience symptoms such as chronic headaches, poor concentration and memory issues for more than two weeks. If the concussion symptoms last longer than a month, your child should be seen by their family doctor and consider a referral to a specialist in concussion management.

How Can I Prevent Concussions from Happening?

The best way to prevent concussions is to prevent high speed/high impact injuries to the head and neck. While helmets are great at avoiding damage to the skull, they DO NOT prevent concussions. Children who have had multiple concussions are at higher risk for long term issues with headaches and learning problems.

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Where Can I Get More Information?

[Parachute Canada](#): An excellent guideline for parents and caregivers. Parachute Canada is a national organization dedicated to injury prevention and has multiple tools for families that can be found here.

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Know Your Options

It can be scary when your child is sick. But in most cases, you don't need to go to the emergency department. If you're unsure, [we're here to help](#).



Please Note

The content provided on these pages is not intended to replace medical advice. If you have concerns about the health of your child, contact your health care provider directly. If your child has an emergency, go to the nearest emergency department or call 911. Alberta Health Services and Project HEAL strive to ensure that all material is correct but will not be held liable for errors or incomplete information contained in these pages.