



Concussion: Information for parents

What is a concussion?

A concussion is a brain injury that, for a short time, affects the way you think and remember things. It can cause many symptoms, but can't be seen on x-rays, computed tomography (CT) scans or MRI scans.

What causes a concussion?

Any blow to the head, face or neck, or somewhere else on the body that causes a sudden jarring of the head may cause a concussion. Some examples are: being hit in the head with a ball, falling out of a crib or bed, or being checked into the boards in hockey.

What are the symptoms of concussion?

A person does not need to be knocked out (lose consciousness) to have had a concussion. In younger children, the signs and symptoms may not be obvious. They may have stomach pain or be upset. Their behavior may change. They may not have headache or show problems with thinking. Some of the most common symptoms of concussion are listed below.

Physical signs:

- Headache
- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Changes in sight
- Loss of consciousness (passing out)
- Vomiting
- Loss of balance/poor coordination
- Decreased playing ability

Changes in behaviour:

- Sadness
- Anxiety
- Inappropriate emotions

Problems thinking:

- Slowed reaction times
- Confusion
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty remembering
- Feeling dazed or in a fog

Trouble with sleep:

- Drowsiness
- Trouble falling asleep
- Sleeping more than usual
- Sleeping less than usual



What should you do if your child has been hit or has fallen?

- If they are playing a sport, make sure they stop playing right away.
- Do not leave the child alone.
- Make sure they see a doctor as soon as possible that day.
- If child is unconscious (knocked out), call 911 immediately for an ambulance to take your child to hospital.
 - Do not move the child or remove any sports equipment (such as a helmet).
 - Wait until paramedics arrive.

When should a child go to a doctor?

Every child who gets a head injury should be seen by a doctor as soon as possible.

If your child is diagnosed with a concussion, check them regularly. It's important to return to a doctor immediately if their symptoms get worse:

- more confusion
- a headache that gets worse
- vomiting more than once
- not waking up
- having trouble walking
- experiencing a seizure
- behaving strangely

Problems caused by a head injury can get worse later that day or night. Do not leave your child alone. There is no need to wake your child during the night, unless you have a concern about their breathing or sleep. If the child seems to be getting worse, see a doctor immediately.

When do I need to see a concussion doctor?

Most children who have been diagnosed with a concussion should be seen by a doctor 3-4 days after their injury for guidance about returning to sports and regular activities. Children who are still having concussion symptoms at that time should be referred to a concussion doctor. Children should not return to regular activity until cleared by a medical doctor.

If your child has been diagnosed with a concussion with significant symptoms at HSC Children's Emergency*, you may be referred to the Minor Injury Clinic for Kids at Pan Am Clinic** for a follow-up assessment three to four days later. If your child still has symptoms of a concussion at that time, an appointment will be made with the concussion doctor.

*HSC Children's Emergency Department: Entrance on William Avenue west of Sherbrook St., Phone 204-787-2306, Open 24-hours every day.

**Minor Injury Clinic for Kids at Pan Am Clinic: 75 Poseidon Bay

How long will it take to get better?

Signs and symptoms of concussion often last for 7-10 days. Sometimes they last much longer, even many weeks or months. If your child has had a concussion before, it may take longer to heal.

How is a concussion treated?

The most important treatment for a concussion is **rest**. Rest means:

- no exercising
- no bike riding
- no play-wrestling with family or friends
- no playing video games
- no schoolwork
- no working on the computer

If they go back to school or resume activities before they are completely better, symptoms could get worse or take longer to go away.

Even though it can be hard for an active person to rest, this is the most important step. Once they are completely better while resting, your child can start to increase his activities slowly (see below). It is important to see a doctor before returning to activity.

After a concussion, when can my child return to school?

Sometimes people who have a concussion find it hard to concentrate in school. They may get a worse headache or feel sick to their stomach if they try to learn. Your child should stay home from school if symptoms get worse while in class. Once the child feels better, they can try half days at school to start. Once the child can manage half days, they can try full days.

When can my child return to sports activities?

Children should not go back to sports if they have any symptoms or signs of a concussion. They must rest until they are completely back to normal.

No child should go back to a sport until they have been cleared to do so by a doctor.

After they feel normal and have seen a doctor, your child can then go through these steps to gradually increase activity:

1. Completely rest until all symptoms are gone.
2. Light exercise, such as walking or stationary cycling, for 10 to 15 minutes.
3. Try a sport-specific activity (such as skating in hockey or running in soccer) for 20 to 30 minutes.
4. Move to "on field" practice, such as ball drills, shooting drills and other activities with no contact (for example, no checking and no heading the ball).
5. Once cleared by a doctor, move to "on field" practice with body contact.
6. Game play.

Each step must take at least one day. If your child shows any symptoms of concussion (headache or feeling sick to the stomach) during the activity, stop the activity immediately and rest for 24-48 hours. Your child should be seen by a doctor before starting these steps again.

Learn more about concussions

Canadian Pediatric Society: www.caringforkids.cps.ca

Think First Canada: www.thinkfirst.ca

Hockey Canada: www.hockeycanada.ca

Important Note: This information provides general guidelines. These general guidelines do not replace individual guidance from a physician and should not be considered, or used as a substitute for, medical advice.

Content is adapted from "Sports Concussion: Information for parents, coaches and trainers" at www.caringforkids.cps.ca