

Concussion in Sports

<http://familydoctor.org/handouts/458.html>

What is a concussion?

A concussion is an injury to the brain. It's usually caused by a blow to the head. Most of the time it doesn't involve a loss of consciousness.

What are some signs of a concussion?

- Headache
- Vision disturbance
- Dizziness
- Loss of balance
- Confusion
- Memory loss (amnesia)
- Ringing ears
- Difficulty concentrating
- Nausea

How is it diagnosed?

First a doctor examines you. The doctor will also get information from people who were there when the blow to the head happened. This is very important, especially if you're confused or if you lost your memory of the injury. The doctor will test your strength, sensation, balance, reflexes and memory. In more serious cases, your doctor will want to get special x-rays of your head, called computed tomographic (CT) scans or magnetic resonance images (MRI).

Does medicine help?

The treatment for a concussion is rest. If you have a headache, you can usually take acetaminophen (brand name: Tylenol). Always ask your doctor before you take any medicine if you've had a concussion.

What should I watch out for?

- Stiff neck
- Difficulty walking, speaking or using your arms
- Severe headache
- Repeated vomiting
- Confusion that gets worse
- Convulsions
- Unusual sleepiness

Tell your doctor if you have any of these symptoms.

When can I return to sports?

You should never return to play while you have any signs of concussion, like headache or dizziness. If your concussion is very mild, you may be allowed to return to play after 15 or 20 minutes. If you had memory loss or loss of consciousness, you may not be able to return to play for 1 to 2 weeks. After a severe concussion, you may not be able to return to play for a month. If this wasn't your first concussion, your return to play may take even longer.

What are the risks of returning to play too early?

A player returning too early could suffer from "second impact syndrome," which may be fatal. A second blow to the head, even a minor one, can result in a loss of the automatic control of blood vessels to the brain. Never return to a sports activity until you are cleared by a doctor.

Are there any lasting effects to a concussion?

Most people get better after a concussion without any permanent damage. People have signs of concussion for weeks to months. Repeated concussions could cause permanent damage. After several concussions, your doctor may talk with you about changing sports.

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