



Recognizing and Treating Concussions

A concussion happens when a blow or jolt to the head causes the soft tissue of the brain to knock against the skull's surface. Concussions can make it hard to focus, balance, sleep and more. Not just athletes get concussions – a hard knock on the head during any activity can give anyone a concussion.

The Stanford Children's Health Concussion Program is designed to help your child safely return to school and sports after a concussion. Our multidisciplinary team of pediatric neurologists, neurosurgeons, orthopedists, nurse practitioners, and physical and speech therapists provide consultation and coordinated care.

Signs and symptoms

Concussion symptoms can range from mild to very severe. Some of the more common symptoms of concussion are:

- Headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea and vomiting
- Double or blurred vision
- Confusion or memory loss
- Low energy, fatigue or trouble sleeping
- Difficulty remembering or concentrating
- Slower reaction time
- Sensitivity to light and noise
- Irritability, sadness, anxiety or other personality changes

Diagnosis

If your child is experiencing any of the following symptoms, go to the ER immediately:

- Prolonged loss of consciousness or lethargy
- Slurred speech or trouble talking
- Severe headache or long-lasting headache
- Confusion, sleepiness or trouble waking up
- Convulsions or seizures
- Significant neck pain
- Numbness or weakness in the arms or legs
- Falling, poor balance or difficulty walking

If your child is not experiencing any of the severe symptoms above:

- It is okay for your child to rest for the first 24 to 48 hours after the injury
 - Your child should be evaluated by your pediatrician in the first 72 hours after the injury
 - Follow the treatment guidelines below for information about returning to school and sports
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Treatment guidelines

- **Cognitive rest:** Follow the return to learn guidelines provided. After an initial 24–48 hours of rest, begin to gradually return to school as soon as possible.
- **Physical activity:** Follow return to play recommendations provided. After an initial 24–48 hours of rest, begin light-intensity cardio, walking or stationary cycling at a slow or medium pace as soon as possible.
- **Sleep:** Eight to 10 hours of sleep a night is advised. Naps are not recommended as they may disrupt sleep at night. Keep a strict sleep schedule.
- **Diet:** Your child should drink plenty of water, at least two to three times more than he or she normally would, and eat meals and snacks regularly throughout the day.
- **Pain medications:** Children with headaches can take Advil, Tylenol or Aleve as directed on the packaging. However, limit pain medications to two days a week to avoid rebound headaches caused by medication overuse.
- **Social integration:** Let your child continue small amounts of social activity (for example, start with one-on-one time with your child and a close friend) to help him or her recover and limit the risk of depression.
- **Patience:** Typical activities may take longer than normal to complete. Allow as much time as needed, and avoid pressuring your child to complete tasks quickly. If your child has trouble recalling information, just fill in the blanks. It does not speed up recovery to force your child to recall information. Have extra patience as there may be increased irritability and frustration. Don't take it personally, and encourage a break to allow your child to cool off.

If symptoms persist after 10 to 14 days and you would like a consultation with a Stanford Children's Health concussion expert, please have your pediatrician send a referral via fax to (650) 721-2884 and our new patient coordinators will reach out to you to schedule an appointment.