

Facts About Sports Concussions

Every year in the United States, an estimated 3.8 million concussions occur. And while the brain injury can occur on or off the field, athletes in particular may not report their symptoms for a variety of reasons. They may fear being removed from play, or they simply may not know the symptoms of concussion.

Concussion results from a direct blow to the head or a force to the body that moves the head quickly. While football and hockey are the sports most people associate with concussion risk, many other popular sports and recreational activities also have a risk of concussion.

What's the danger?

Concussions can be serious, so make sure to consult your doctor if you're experiencing symptoms. (See below for more information on symptoms.)

Pediatricians, sports medicine specialists, neurologists, family practitioners and athletic trainers all know how to make the diagnosis. You should visit the emergency room if there is a loss of consciousness, suspected injury to the neck, worsening of symptoms, persistent vomiting or seizure.

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Knowing the warning signs of concussion can make all the difference for your brain health. Speak up if you experience any of the following symptoms following an impact on or off the field:

- Headache
- Confusion
- Mental fogginess/cloudiness
- Slowed reaction time
- Difficulty concentrating
- Clumsiness/imbalance
- Dizziness
- Nausea or vomiting
- Changes in behavior
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Blurred or double vision
- Ringing in the ears
- Loss of consciousness



It's not just about contact sports. Concussions can occur in sports, in gym class or recess, on the playground or at home:

- Bicycle riding
- Recess/playgrounds
- Football
- Soccer
- Ice hockey
- Wrestling
- Lacrosse
- Basketball
- Snowboarding
- Skiing
- Skateboarding



Take time to heal.

Typically, treatment for concussion involves reducing physical and cognitive activities, such as extensive reading, computer use and athletic practice. This reduced stimulation enables the brain to heal. However, you do not need to avoid all activities during this recovery period.

A person with a concussion should also avoid any activity that has a risk of additional contact to the head. A second blow to the head while recovering from a concussion can cause a significant increase in the severity of symptoms and length of recovery time; and in very rare cases, may result in a more serious brain injury.

Protect yourself.

With the proper precautions, you can enjoy playing while staying safe. Follow instructions from your coach or trainer during practices, and watch that your teammates are following protocols, too. You also could ask if your coach is certified in concussion awareness. Make sure to wear properly fitted and maintained protective headgear and padding for your sport.

Remember: Concussion isn't limited to the playing field.

Whether you're biking, horseback riding, riding in a car, rollerblading, skateboarding or snowboarding, concussion can happen at any time. Be conscious of what you're doing. Depending on your activity, wear a helmet and seatbelt, and keep to speed limits.

If you suffer a concussion, protect yourself not only by following your doctor's orders closely, but also by listening to your body.



A gradual return to your sport should follow the timeline your doctor recommends, and may look like:

- Reduce physical and cognitive (thinking) activity
- Light aerobic exercise
- Increased aerobic exercise or sport-specific exercise
- Non-contact training drills
- Full-contact practice
- Return to play—if the person remains without symptoms during the previous steps

