

CONCUSSION FACTS

for Children and Teens

Young Athlete Center

Children's
HOSPITAL • ST. LOUIS
BJC HealthCare

Washington[®]
University in St. Louis
Physicians

What is a concussion?

A concussion is an injury to the brain that can happen when someone hits their head (or sometimes other places on their body) and their head jerks quickly. The brain can move inside the hard bone protecting it on the outside, called your skull. Think of the brain as being like a wiggly bowl of Jell-O. If we hit that bowl of Jell-O hard, the Jell-O wiggles. The brain can wiggle as well, and when it does, it can hurt the brain and that may make a concussion happen.

How may I feel after a concussion?

Concussions can be tricky. Most of the time you won't feel like yourself after the injury. However, sometimes you may feel perfectly fine right after it happens but within minutes to hours you may not feel right. Common things that kids experience are headaches, feeling dizzy, not being able to concentrate, feeling like lights are too bright or noises are too loud. You may be confused about what has happened and may have some trouble being able to remember things. You may get really tired after it happens. Some kids feel like they need to throw up and some kids actually do throw up. A small number of kids may lose consciousness ("get knocked out") after they get hit. You may feel like you get sad for no reason or things around you may irritate or annoy you, even though they didn't before.

While none of these symptoms sound pleasant to deal with, we expect all of them to eventually go away.



What should I do if I don't feel right after I hit my head?

The most important thing to do is tell someone you don't feel right. That may be a parent, a coach, or a teacher. Concussions can be an easy injury to hide, because the symptoms aren't visible. Other people can't see your headache, or that you may be dizzy, or having trouble concentrating.

It's also important to tell someone especially if you are playing a sport. We know that kids who continue to play their sport after their injury typically feel much worse and take longer to get better (and are out of their sport longer) than kids who stop playing right after their injury happens. You may also put yourself at risk for hurting your brain even more if you had another hit to your head while your brain is already injured. So, the best thing to do after you've been hit in the head is to stop playing right away, even if you don't feel anything or don't look sick.

What can I do to help my brain heal from a concussion?

Every concussion is different so there isn't really something that every kid can do to help get better. We do not want you to return to your sports or gym class until someone who understands concussions, like your doctor, gives you the okay to start those things again. It is ok to do some brisk walking for 15-20 minutes each day. If certain things bother you, like doing schoolwork, reading, or using electronics, you should take breaks from doing those things if they make you feel worse. Stopping them completely for a period of time won't get you better any quicker. It is ok to still use your brain, but you need to remember it is hurt and it may need to avoid being pushed too hard.

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For more information call 314.454.KIDS or 800.678.KIDS

What should I do if I am having trouble at school? Should I stay home from school?

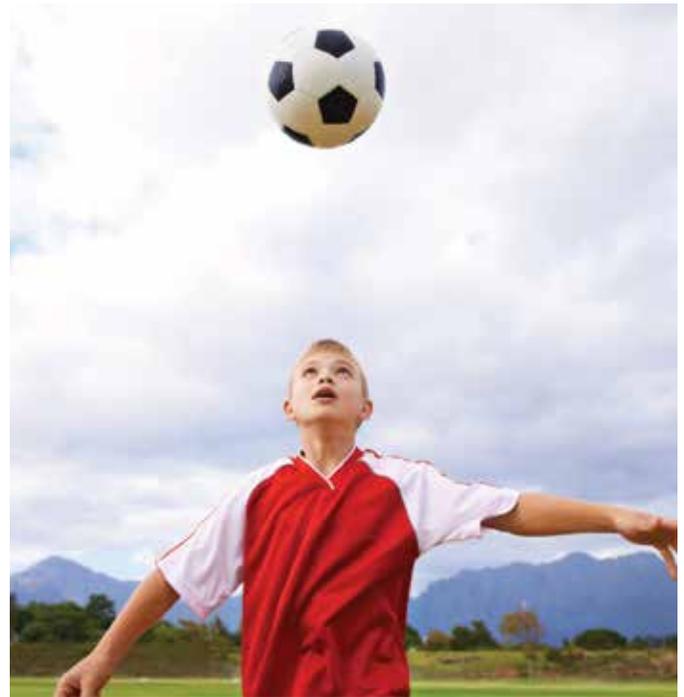
Some kids may need a day or two off after a concussion but most kids can, and should, be back in school after their concussion. Using your brain doesn't make the concussion worse. It may actually help things get better quicker. We just don't want kids to push through their normal amount of school work if they aren't feeling well.

The best thing to do is to talk with your teachers about how you are feeling and what things are causing you trouble. Remember, just like a coach or parent can't see most of what you may be feeling after a concussion, your teacher can't either. Teachers can help reduce your workload or maybe give you some extra time to get work done. But that works best when your teachers know what's going on. If they don't know, they can't help you as easily. Your school nurse or school counselor can also provide assistance while you are at school.

How long is it going to take for me to get better?

About half of concussions will heal within a week of the injury. Most kids heal by 4 weeks after their injury. There are some concussions that can take longer to get better. Some kids also have injuries to their neck when they had their concussion. Other kids may have injuries to the parts of the brain that help their eyes work normally or keep their bodies balanced. When those injuries happen, some kids may need some treatments by a physical therapist to help them fix those problems. Even for kids who need some therapy, we still expect them to fully recover.

My notes:



Can I prevent getting a concussion?

We can't prevent all concussions. Even with helmets or other gear that tries to protect the head, there isn't any type of protection that keeps the brain from moving in the skull. That's the hard part. There is some research that shows that kids who get stronger neck muscles may be able to lower their risk for a concussion.

Overall, the best things you can do are avoid unnecessary collisions, keep your neck muscles strong, play by the rules and be aware of your surroundings when you are playing sports.

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