

Concussion/Head Trauma

What is a concussion?

A concussion is a type of traumatic brain injury (TBI). It is caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body that causes the head and brain to move quickly back and forth. Some of the ways you can get a concussion are when you hit your head during a fall, car crash, or sports injury. Health care professionals sometimes refer to concussions as “mild” brain injuries because they are usually not life-threatening. Even so, their effects can be serious.

What should I expect once I'm home?

Most people with a concussion recover quickly and fully. During recovery, it is important to know that many people have a range of symptoms. Some symptoms may appear right away, while others may not be noticed for hours or even days after the injury. You may not realize you have problems until you try to do your usual activities again.

Post concussive symptoms can involve physical symptoms, thinking/remembering difficulties, emotional/mood changes or sleep problems. Some symptoms include:

- Difficulty thinking clearly
- Feeling slowed down
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty remembering new information
- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting (early on)
- Sensitivity to noise or light
- Feeling tired, having no energy
- Fuzzy or blurry vision
- Dizziness
- Balance problems
- Irritability
- Sadness
- More emotional
- Nervousness or anxiety
- Sleeping more than usual
- Sleeping less than usual
- Trouble falling asleep

These post concussive symptoms can be part of the normal healing process and are generally not signs of permanent damage or serious health problems. Most symptoms go away within 2 weeks without any medical intervention.

Self-Care Recommendations

- Getting plenty of rest and sleep helps the brain to heal. Do not try to do too much too fast
- **Avoid activities that are physically demanding (exercising) or require a lot of thinking or concentration (e.g., texting, working on the computer, playing video games). Ignoring your symptoms and “toughing it out” often make symptoms worse.**
- Do not drink alcohol.
- You may take acetaminophen (Tylenol) for pain following the directions on the container. Do not take aspirin or ibuprofen unless instructed by your health care professional. A light diet is recommended.
- **You should NEVER return to full activities if you still have ANY symptoms – (Be sure that you do not have any symptoms at rest and while doing any physical activity and/or activities that require a lot of thinking or concentration.)**
- As symptoms decrease, you may begin to gradually return to your daily activities. If symptoms worsen or return, lessen your activities, then try again to increase your activities gradually.
- It is normal to feel frustrated, sad and even angry because you cannot return to normal activities right away. With any injury, a full recovery will reduce the chances of getting hurt again.
- Refer to the boxed chart on page 2 for more detailed instructions on returning to normal activities and exercise.

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Gradual Return Plan

- **Pay careful attention to your symptoms and your thinking and concentration skills at each stage of activity. Move to the next level of activity only if you do not experience any symptoms at each level.** *If your symptoms return, stop these activities and let your health care professional know. They will give you recommendations about how to proceed from one level to the next.*
- Return to activities should occur in gradual steps beginning with aerobic exercise only to increase your heart rate (e.g., stationary cycle); moving to increasing your heart rate with movement (e.g., running); then adding controlled contact if appropriate; and finally return to sports competition.

LEVELS:

1. No physical activity/Limit thinking and concentration (cognitive) activities.
 2. Low levels of physical activity (*i.e., symptoms do not come back during or after the activity*). This includes walking, light jogging, light stationary biking, light weightlifting (lower weight, higher reps, no bench, no squat).
 3. Moderate levels of physical activity with body/head movement. This includes moderate jogging, brief running, moderate-intensity stationary biking, moderate-intensity weightlifting (reduced time and/or reduced weight from your typical routine).
 4. Heavy non-contact physical activity. This includes sprinting/running, high-intensity stationary biking, regular weightlifting routine, non-contact sport-specific drills (in 3 planes of movement).
 5. Full contact in controlled practice.
 6. Full contact in game play.
- You may need additional restrictions for academic work. This could include complete rest, shortened days and/or extra time for assignments and tests.

When should I go to the hospital emergency department?

Sometimes serious problems develop after a head injury. Go to the emergency department if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- Repeated vomiting
- Headache that gets worse and does not go away
- Loss of consciousness or unable to stay awake during times you would normally be awake
- Getting more confused, restless or agitated
- Convulsions or seizures
- Difficulty walking or difficulty with balance
- Weakness or numbness
- Difficulty with your vision
- Difficulty speaking

Most of all, if you have any symptom that concerns you, your family members, or friends, don't delay, go to the Emergency Department right away.

In an emergency go to Mount Nittany Medical Center or call 911 for an ambulance.

Test Results and Advice Nurse

Send secure message to advice nurse via the UHS website or call 814- 863-4463.

Appointments

Appointments can be made online via the UHS website, by phone 814-863-0774, or in person. If you are unable to keep your appointment, please call or go online to cancel. Otherwise you will be charged for the visit.

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