Head Injuries

Fortunately, few head injuries are serious. Nevertheless, bleeding inside the skull from head trauma can occur. Internal bleeding puts pressure on the brain and can lead to severe impairment. Your clinician determines your risk for serious internal injury through questions and examination. If you are at low risk for internal injury, you will be sent home. If your head injury was more serious, your clinician will put you in a hospital for observation. Even if you are sent home, you should not be left alone. You should be watched by a responsible adult.

What is a concussion?
A concussion (mild, traumatic brain injury) is an injury to the brain that is caused by a blow to the head. After a concussion, the brain doesn't work right for a while. Most of the time it does not involve a loss of consciousness, but a concussion can cause a person to be “knocked out” (unconscious) or to have memory loss (amnesia). A concussion can be dangerous even if the person isn't knocked out.

Risk Increases with:
- Excessive alcohol consumption or substance abuse
- Contact sports- especially football and boxing
- Seizure Disorders
- Illnesses that affect balance or walking ability
- Bicycle or motorcycle riding without a helmet
- Not using seat belts
- Prior head injury

Is a concussion serious?
Any concussion can be dangerous because it affects the brain. The longer the patient is unconscious or the longer the memory loss lasts, the more serious the concussion. You can have a serious concussion even without losing consciousness or having a cut or swelling on your head where you were struck.

What should I watch for?
If the following symptoms develop, obtain medical assistance:
- Vomiting more than once
- Severe headache that won't ease up or go away, even after a dose of acetaminophen
- Confusion
- Restlessness or irritability
- Pupils of different sizes
- Convulsions or seizures
- Trouble using arms or legs
- Temperature above 100.5F
- Very stiff neck
- Garbled speech
- Bleeding from the nose or ears
- Unusual sleepiness or decreased alertness

Is it okay to sleep?
You might become sleepy after a concussion. This sleepiness may be caused by the activity that caused you to get the concussion or it may be caused by the concussion itself. It's perfectly all right for you to go to sleep as long as a responsible person wakes you up every two hours to be sure you are easy to wake. You should be able to recognize this person and tell them such things as your birthday, age, and telephone number. If you can't be easily awakened or don't answer the questions correctly, the person should seek medical attention.

How long should I be observed?
You should be observed (watched) for 24 hours. Most serious problems showed up on the first 24 hours after the concussion.
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May I take something for pain?
Only if your clinician tells you to. You may take acetaminophen (Tylenol) for pain following the directions on the container. Do not take aspirin or ibuprofen since these medications inhibit the ability of blood to clot and could result in bleeding. A light diet is recommended.

Are there any lasting after-effects from a concussion?
Concussions are usually not serious, but they can result in permanent damage to the brain and can even cause death. Some people will have headache, dizziness, fatigue, irritability, and impaired memory and concentration for up to 6 months after a concussion. You should be evaluated if you have persistent or worsening symptoms.

When can I return to sports or work?
The more severe the concussion, the longer you must stay away from sports or work. Here are some general guidelines:

- You should NEVER return to play while you have any signs of concussion, including headache, dizziness, nausea & confusion.
- You should be re-evaluated before return to play.
- Repeated concussions can cause permanent brain damage.

Test Results and Advice Nurse
Please call the nurse for test results and advice: 863-4463

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

To schedule or cancel appointments call 863-0774 or schedule your appointment online through the UHS website

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