

ASK AHAI: IS THERE A “MAGIC HELMET” THAT PREVENTS CONCUSSIONS?

QUESTION: I have been reading about the concussion issue and am concerned. We are shopping for a new helmet; does AHAI have any recommendations for a concussion preventing helmet?

ANSWER: Now there is a question that has been asked many times and after consulting with AHAI concussion specialist, Dr. Beth Pieroth, of the North Shore Medical Group...

The plain and simple fact is that there has not been a helmet invented that can prevent a concussion!

What about the newest helmets? Nope! Concussion is a function of force - velocity vs. stopping distance. Although you may not fracture a bone, a helmet cannot prevent the brain from slamming into the inside of the skull - hence a concussion. Not even the best of helmets today can prevent that!

Helmets and face masks as required by USA Hockey and certified by HECC can and do provide great protection for injury to the face and head - they just cannot protect the inside of the head - where your brain resides. A helmet is an essential piece of equipment that can provide great protection, but it must be worn correctly. If not worn correctly, the helmet can actually cause head or facial injury - if it not snug, if the straps are loose, the cage can come up during contact and split the chin, lips or knock out teeth, maybe even break a bone.

A few years ago, there was an Illinois High School team who had just purchase new helmets and cages for all their players. The club was trying to afford the best protection for their players. It was a great idea. We checked the helmets about 10 days after they were issued to find only 5 of 18 were actually being worn correctly. Many could have injured the player. Some had the J-hooks on the side of the helmet “moved out of the way”, or completely removed and/or straps loosened to allow the helmet to be slid up and moved easily - what do you think happens during contact if the player can just slide his helmet up over his head? You guessed it - busted chins, lips, teeth and noses! The best equipment is of little use if not worn properly.



A properly worn helmet should be tight around the crown of the head and again, tight at the chin cup in the face mask. It should be snug and not slide around. The face mask should not have any gap or “play” between the chin cup and the players chin. You should not be able to pull the face mask up over the face without un-snapping the straps. Check out the video to the left. If your player can slide his helmet over his head - you have a problem.

A well-fitted helmet can offer great protection against head injury - but not concussion. Concussion is a brain injury, not a head injury. We should not confuse the two.

The best prevention for concussion is not hitting one another in the head. We cannot do much about the nature or inherent risks of our game - frozen pucks, hard ice, hard boards, hard glass, steel blades and goal posts - but we can do something about taking the “choice” of hits to the head, out of the game!