

Concussion

“But you are a shield around me, O LORD; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head.”

Psalm 3:3

The brain is protected inside the skull by a cushion of liquid, called cerebrospinal fluid. However, a violent blow to the head can cause the brain to bounce around inside the skull, causing bleeding of the brain and tearing of nerve fibers. Whenever a hit to the head knocks the person out, or causes a dazed feeling afterward, a concussion has occurred.

A concussion is always caused by a blow to the head, but people don't usually lose consciousness. While **most** concussions are mild, it is important to know the symptoms and be able to identify a serious situation which needs immediate medical attention. Symptoms may last for days, or even weeks, after the initial injury.

The two most common symptoms of a concussion are confusion and loss of memory regarding the event that caused the injury. Other symptoms may include headache, dizziness, ringing in the ears, nausea or vomiting, and slurred speech. It is not uncommon for a person to repeat the same statement over and over again, such as “What happened?” Symptoms that may be seen hours or even days later include: a change in mood, the inability to think clearly, sensitivity to light and noise, change in sleep pattern.

Head trauma is common for toddlers and infants, but the symptoms are harder to recognize because small children can't tell us how they are feeling. Therefore, adults must watch their children closely and seek medical attention if their children are: tired or listless for no apparent reason, change eating or sleep patterns, show a lack of interest in favorite toys, have a marked decrease in balance. Any child who has lost consciousness, has a seizure, or gets a large bruise or cut on the scalp, should be seen by a doctor right away.

For adults, signs of a serious concussion include: repeated vomiting, unequal pupils, or trouble seeing, loss of taste or smell, weakness on one side of the body, inability to wake up, continued confusion, trouble walking

Any of these symptoms may indicate one of many serious conditions, and an evaluation by a doctor should be done quickly. The doctor will take a history, and do a neurological exam, checking memory, concentration, and reflexes. A CT scan or MRI might be ordered. All these tests will help the health care professional to evaluate and diagnose any problem.

The ultimate goal should be prevention, of course. A little common sense goes a long way toward protecting ourselves and our children. Always wear a helmet when riding a bicycle, skating or skateboarding, horseback riding, or playing contact sports. Always buckle your seatbelt, and strap the children into appropriate car seats. Treatment for concussions is pretty much time and rest. Headaches can be treated with ice, Tylenol, or Ibuprofen, but avoid aspirin due to the increased risk of bleeding. Most concussions will get better on their own, but when in doubt, get evaluated by your physician.

For more information, check out: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001802/
<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/concussion/DS00320>

Blessings, Nurse Karen