



Head Injury

PATIENT EDUCATION SERIES

A head injury results from a direct blow to the head or sudden jarring whiplash effect. Car and bicycle accidents, contact sports and falls can result in head injury. Head injuries can range from mild to serious.

Concussion refers to the changes in mental status that can occur after head injury. Confusion and amnesia are hallmarks of concussion, even if there was no loss of consciousness with the head injury.

What are the symptoms of a concussion?

- Headache
- Disorientation or confusion
- Dizziness/vertigo
- Nausea, vomiting
- Visual problems
- Memory problems
- Mood changes
- Sensitivity to light and sound

What should I do after a head injury?

Remember it is common to have a mild headache and some difficulty concentrating, remembering things and putting thoughts together after a head injury. These symptoms usually go away in a few days to a week. They last a shorter time if you rest for a few days after a concussion.

Most head injuries get better within several days. Please follow these instructions carefully.

During the first 24 hours:

- Remain in the company of others for several hours after a head injury or however long your provider advises, to ensure that your symptoms are not worsening. Have a relative or friend stay with you as you should not be left alone.
- **Do not** use sedatives, tranquilizers or medications that make you sleepy, unless told to do so by your medical provider.
- **Do not** take medicine for pain other than what your Health Services provider has recommended.
- **Do not** use alcohol (including beer and wine) or any other illegal drugs.
- **Do not** drive or operate machinery.
- No exercise, sports, lifting or strenuous activity, until your medical provider clears you to resume these activities.
- “Cognitive rest” from academic work such as reading, writing, and using the computer is important as such activities may increase concussion symptoms.

- If you are an athlete, your medical provider, with input from your trainer, will determine when you can participate on your team.
- Eat and drink less than usual, especially if your stomach is upset. Clear liquids are best (water, weak tea, broth, ginger ale, jello, Gatorade, apple juice, popsicles, or ice chips), advancing to bland solids as tolerated.

Keeping follow-up appointments with your medical provider is very important in evaluating your recovery.

Call EMS at 401.863-4111 if you notice any of the following signs and symptoms.

- Increasing drowsiness, confusion, agitation, restlessness. Or if, as the person observing a head injured patient, you have difficulty rousing the patient, call EMS.
- Intense headache or a headache that gets worse or feels different.
- Dizziness or fainting.
- Vomiting or severe nausea.
- Trouble walking or staggering or if you notice weakness or numbness of an arm or leg.
- Slurred speech or trouble speaking.
- Blurry vision or double vision or other changes in your eyesight.
- Fluid discharge or blood from the nose or ears.
- Stiff neck or fever.
- Convulsions or seizures.
- Worsening memory problems.
- Incontinence (bowel or bladder).
- Anything else that worries you.

If you are unsure about whether to call for EMS, call Health Services at 401.863-1330.

Post-Concussion Syndrome

After head injury, even without loss of consciousness, some people can have bothersome symptoms which can be longer lasting (weeks). Most post-concussive symptoms resolve in 7 to 10 days. Post-Concussion Syndrome may include headache, dizziness, fatigue, irritability, anxiety, depression, noise sensitivity, insomnia or loss of concentration and memory.

Prevention of Head Injury

- Wear a safety belt when riding in a motor vehicle.
- Do not drink and drive.
- Do not drink alcohol or drink only in moderation to prevent falls.
- Wear a safety helmet for biking, roller blading, skiing or snowboarding.

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