Head Injury /Concussion

Brown Health Services Patient Education Series

A head injury results from a direct blow to the head, or from a sudden jarring whiplash effect. Car and bicycle accidents, contact sports and falls are examples of circumstances which may lead to head injury.

Head injuries can cause a cascade of physiologic changes in the brain, resulting in a constellation of symptoms known as concussion. Even with no loss of consciousness, physical, cognitive, emotional, balance, vision and sleep symptoms may occur when a head injury results in concussion.

What are the symptoms of a concussion?

- Headache
- Disorientation or confusion
- Dizziness/vertigo
- Nausea, vomiting
- Blurred/hazy vision
- Sensitivity to light/sound
- Mood changes/irritability
- Sleep disturbances
- Drowsiness/fatigue
- Balance problems
- Difficulty concentrating/remembering
- Feeling slowed down or “in a fog”

What should I do when I have a concussion?

Most concussions get better within several days. Overexertion, re-injury, academic and emotional stress can aggravate symptoms and prolong recovery.

During the first 24 hours:

- Remain in the company of others after a head injury to ensure that you are not alone should symptoms worsen.
- 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 drink alcohol (including beer and wine) or use any other recreational drugs.
- Do not drive or operate machinery.
- No exercise, sports, lifting or strenuous activity, until your medical provider clears you to resume these activities.
- If you are an athlete, your medical provider, with input from your athletic trainer, will determine when you can resume participation on your team.
- “Cognitive rest” is advised. Avoid reading, writing, and limit screen time (including TV and computer, texting, games) to reduce visual stimulation which can increase concussion symptoms.
- Eat and drink less than usual, especially if your stomach is upset. Begin with clear liquids (water, weak tea, broth, ginger ale, jello, Gatorade, apple juice, popsicles, or ice chips), and advance to solids as tolerated.
Worsening Symptoms of Concussion

If you experience any of the following, call EMS at 401.863-4111. If you are unsure about whether to call for EMS, call Health Services at 401.863-1330.

- Increasing drowsiness, confusion, agitation, restlessness
- Difficulty rousing the head-injured person
- Intense/worsening/different headache
- Worsening dizziness or fainting.
- Vomiting or severe nausea.
- Trouble walking/staggering
- Weakness or numbness of an arm or leg
- Slurred speech or trouble speaking
- Worsening visual changes /double vision
- Fluid or blood from the nose or ears
- Stiff neck or fever
- Seizures
- Worsening memory problems
- Incontinence (bowel or bladder)
- Anything else that worries you

Prolonged Symptoms

While concussion symptoms usually resolve in 7-10 days, some may experience symptoms for weeks or longer.

Discuss persistent concussion symptoms with your medical provider, and athletic trainer if you are a student athlete.

How can I manage my academics when I have a concussion?

- Your medical provider will communicate with the Office of Student Life (OSL) after a concussion to support cognitive rest and your recovery.
- OSL in turn will keep faculty informed of your status in terms of participation in academics.
- Keeping follow-up appointments with your medical provider and athletic trainer (when applicable) is very important in evaluating your recovery over time.

No revisions needed. July 6, 2018/ LNW