

RECOGNIZING CONCUSSION

POSSIBLE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF CONCUSSION:

A concussion is an injury to the brain's cells that causes a disturbance in normal brain function. Concussion can be caused by either getting hit directly on the head or by a hit to another part of the body that causes the head to accelerate forward or backward (like whiplash). Most athletes who experience concussion will exhibit any one of more of a variety of symptoms.

Signs observed by coaches, administrators, athletic trainers, officials, parents, or other athletes include but are not limited to

- Appears Dazed, Stunned, or Disoriented
- Forgets Plays or Demonstrates Short-Term Memory Difficulties (e.g. is unsure of the game, score, or opponent)
- Exhibits Difficulties with Balance or Coordination
- Answers Questions Slowly or Inaccurately
- Loses Consciousness
- Demonstrates Behavior or Personality Changes
- Is Unable to Recall Events Prior To or After the Hit

Symptoms reported by the student-athlete to a coach, athletic trainer, and/or physician include but are not limited to

- Has a Headache
- Is Nauseous or Vomiting
- Has Blurry Vision
- Has Difficulty Remembering Things/Memory Impairment
- Is Dizzy
- Is Drowsy
- Is Sleeping More or Less Than Usual
- Feeling Fatigued
- Feeling "In a Fog"
- Feeling Like Things are Moving in Slow Motion
- Is Unusually Emotional
- Is Unusually Irritable, Nervous or Sad
- Feels a Loss of Orientation
- Has Poor Balance/Coordination
- Feels Ringing in the Ears
- Is Sensitive to Bright Lights/Loud Noises



CONCUSSED KIDS TAKE LONGER TO HEAL

The recognition of concussion is especially critical for those working with younger athletes. Leading experts agree that high school athletes have a significantly greater risk of sustaining a concussion, and those concussions are taking significantly longer to heal when compared to older athletes. There are many potential reasons for this, but most researchers agree that the younger brain is more vulnerable because it is not fully developed. There is also a strong suggestion that many concussions sustained by younger athletes go unreported because of a lack of awareness of what constitutes a concussion. Because of this, young athletes are often not referred for medical care and are allowed to continue to play. This can be catastrophic.

Youth sport coaches and parents of young athletes should be vigilant in their watch for the onset of concussive signs and symptoms. If concussion is suspected,

- Always seek advice from a Physician and/or Certified Athletic Trainer, and
- Never return the young athlete to play the same day as the concussive injury is sustained.



UNDERSTANDING THE RISK OF SECOND IMPACT SYNDROME

The immediate recognition of the concussion in young athletes, especially, is critical because repeated concussions pose a very real threat of catastrophic outcome, even death..

There is evidence that athletes who suffer a second concussion before the symptoms of the first have healed are susceptible to a phenomenon called Second Impact Syndrome, or SIS.

Though rare, SIS is characterized by rapid swelling of the brain. Surgery does not help and there is little hope for recovery. Most die, but those who live through SIS are often severely disabled. SIS is most often associated with athletes under the age of 19, perhaps because of the sensitivity of their developing brain and perhaps because the seriousness of the first concussion is often overlooked.

The first concussion does not need to be severe in order for SIS to occur. And, in many instances, it does not take a crushing second blow either to spark the onset of SIS. In fact, typically it is a subtle blow and it can occur days or even weeks after the initial concussion is sustained.

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WHAT ARE CONCUSSION'S DANGER SIGNS?

Be alert for symptoms that worsen over time. The athlete should be seen in an emergency department right away if he/she has:

- Any loss of consciousness (even a brief loss of consciousness should be taken seriously)
- One pupil (the black part in the middle of the eye) is larger than the other
- Drowsiness or cannot be awakened
- A headache that gets worse and does not go away
- Weakness, numbness, or decreased coordination
- Repeated vomiting or nausea
- Slurred speech
- Convulsions or seizures
- Difficulty recognizing people or places
- Increasing confusion, restlessness, or agitation
- Unusual behavior

Children and teens with a concussion should NEVER return to sports or recreation activities on the same day the injury occurred. They should delay returning to their activities until a health care provider experienced in evaluating for concussion says they are symptom-free and it's OK to return to play. This means, until permitted, not returning to:

- Sports practices
- Sports games/contests
- Physical Education classes
- Recess or physical activity

REMEMBER...

- ALL Concussions are Serious
- Most Concussions Occur WITHOUT a Loss of Consciousness
- Recognition and Proper Response to Concussions When They First Occur Can Help Aid Recovery and Prevent Further Injury, or Even Death.