

What Is a Concussion?

Answers for Parents

What is a concussion?

A concussion is a mild, temporary injury to the brain that disrupts how the brain normally works. Concussions are caused by a hit or jolt to the head. Symptoms can get worse over a matter of days, or new symptoms can occur in the days following the injury. Sometimes concussions are casually called “dings” or “getting your bell rung.” No matter what you call it, it is important to get your child examined by a physician, and for concussions to be properly managed.

What are the signs and symptoms of a concussion?

Visit the doctor or go to the emergency room IMMEDIATELY if your child is experiencing:

- Increasing confusion
- Severe, worsening or persistent headache
- Multiple vomiting episodes
- Difficulty waking up
- Trouble walking
- Seizure
- Strange behavior
- Weakness
- Loss of or sudden change in vision
- One pupil appearing larger than the other
- Loss of consciousness
- Bloody or clear fluid from the ears or nose

Visit the doctor within a few days if your child is experiencing:

- Dizziness or confusion
- Memory loss and can't recall what happened around the time of the injury
- Headache
- Nausea
- Sensitivity to light/noise
- Trouble concentrating, difficulty remembering, slowed thinking
- Emotional changes: irritability, sadness, anxiety, etc.
- Fatigue or difficulties with sleep

What happens if your child goes back to sports too soon after a concussion?

While most young people recover from a single concussion, everyone's recovery is unique. If an athlete returns to activity after suffering a concussion before the symptoms have gone away, the result can be prolonged headaches, poor school performance and many other post-concussive syndrome symptoms. Also, another blow to the head while the initial concussion is still healing can cause fatal brain swelling—a condition known as second impact syndrome. When in doubt, athletes should not return to play until properly assessed.



What can you do to help your child get better?

1. Take it easy!

- Allow sufficient rest for the brain so it can recover well.
- Rest from all contact or strenuous physical activity until evaluated by a physician. Once evaluated and feeling better, beginning light physical activity/conditioning is not only okay, but encouraged as long as symptoms do not worsen or recur. Continue to avoid overly strenuous or contact activity.
- Rest from texting, email, computer time, phone calls, loud music/TV/ movies and video games.
- Rest from intense studying and reading, as directed by your doctor.
- Needing more rest than usual after a concussion is normal. Have your child take a break or a short nap whenever he or she feels tired.

2. Be safe and smart!

Until your child is feeling better, he or she should not do anything that may cause another fall or brain injury. Initially that means no activities like riding a bike, skateboarding or playing sports.

3. Break things down into easy steps.

After a concussion, it may be harder to concentrate or pay attention. So, rather than studying for an hour straight, your child should study for no more than 30 minutes at a time before taking a break and then studying for another 30 minutes.

4. See a doctor experienced in treating concussions.

When can your child go back to sports safely?

Once all of the symptoms are gone, a doctor will evaluate your child and determine readiness to return to sports. Your child will be evaluated with tests of memory, concentration, balance and more.

Why should you choose the comprehensive CHLA Sports Concussion Program for your follow-up?

- Same-day or next-day medical appointments to evaluate your child soon after a concussion
- Consultation to determine appropriate, safe and timely return to sports
- Multidisciplinary team of Board-certified experts in sports medicine, neuropsychology, rehabilitation and more
- Coordination of care with primary care providers, school personnel, coaches, athletic trainers and other relevant personnel



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To schedule an appointment please
call **323-361-2142**.

ATC phone line: **323-800-7700**

For walk-in clinic availability please
contact sportsmedicine@chla.usc.edu.