

Patient Handout: Concussion





WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

A concussion is a brain injury that cannot be seen on routine X-rays, CT scans, or MRIs. It affects the way a person may think and remember things, and can cause a variety of symptoms.

Any blow to the head, face or neck, or a blow to the body that jars the head, could cause a concussion.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF A CONCUSSION?

Signs and symptoms of a concussion can appear immediately or hours after the impact. Each person might experience concussion in a different way. It is typical to experience one or more of the following:

PHYSICAL	COGNITIVE
 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dizziness• Nausea or vomiting• "Pressure in the head"• Headache• Balance problems• Sensitivity to light• Neck pain• Seizure or convulsion• Blurred vision• Loss of consciousness	 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sensitivity to noise• Feeling slowed down• Fatigue or low energy• Difficulty remembering• Confusion• Drowsiness• Difficulty concentrating• Amnesia
EMOTIONAL	SLEEP
 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Irritability• Nervous or anxious• More emotional• Feeling like in a "fog"• "Don't feel right"• Sadness	 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Insomnia – unable to sleep• Poor sleep quality• Sleeping too much


Source: parachute.ca

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I SUSPECT A CONCUSSION?

In all suspected cases of concussion, the person should stop the activity right away. Continuing increases their risk of more severe, longer-lasting concussion symptoms, as well as increases their risk of other injury.

Anyone with a suspected concussion should be checked out by a medical doctor.

If any of the red flag symptoms below are present, get medical help immediately. If the person is unconscious, call an ambulance. Do not move the person or remove any equipment, such as a helmet, in case of a spine injury.

RED FLAGS
 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Person complains of neck pain• Deteriorating conscious state• Increasing confusion or irritability• Severe or increasing headache• Repeated vomiting• Unusual behaviour change• Seizure or convulsion• Double vision• Weakness or tingling / burning in arms or legs

Source: parachute.ca

HOW LONG DOES A CONCUSSION LAST?

The symptoms of a concussion usually last one to four weeks, but may last longer. In some cases, it can take weeks or months to heal. If a person has had a concussion before, it may take them longer to heal the next time.

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How Is a Concussion Treated?

THE FIRST 48 HOURS

Have someone stay with you for the first 24 hours after the concussion.

Rest and Sleep

- **Rest for the first 24 hours** – it’s one of the best things to help your brain recover.
- **It’s okay to sleep if you want.** You usually don’t have to be woken up every few hours.
- **Don’t do any strenuous activity (like jogging) for at least 24 hours**, as it can make your concussion worse.

Rest Your Brain

- **Limit reading, television, video games etc. for the first 48 hours, so that your brain can recover.** You may find that it helps to take time off school or work.
- **Stay away from bright lights, loud noises, and crowds for the first 48 hours, as they can make your symptoms worse.**

Diet: Start with clear fluids (like apple juice or ginger ale) and slowly return to a normal diet.

Managing Pain: Take acetaminophen (Tylenol) for pain. You can take up to 1000 mg four times a day.

Driving: Wait at least 24 hours to drive, even if you think you’re okay. Don’t drive if you have concerns about your ability to drive.

Drinking/Drugs: Do not drink alcohol, take sedatives (medicine that relaxes you) or recreational drugs, as they may make you feel worse or hide warning signs.

Sports and Leisure: Stay away from activities that can cause another head injury until your doctor says it’s okay. A second blow to the head can cause more damage to the brain.

Sources: Parachute.ca, Alberta MyHealth

THE FIRST 4 WEEKS

The symptoms below are common after a concussion. They usually get better on their own within a few weeks:

- Feeling tired or “slow”
- Problems falling or staying asleep
- Feeling confused, poor concentration, or slow to answer questions
- Feeling dizzy, poor balance, or poor coordination
- Sensitivity to light or sounds
- Ringing in ears
- Mild headache, sometimes with nausea and/or vomiting
- Being irritable, mood swings, or feeling somewhat sad or “down”

How to Help Your Brain Heal:

- **Get enough sleep and rest often enough**, including during the day, so that you feel well rested.
- **Work and Study:** most people go back to work or study within a few days. Start slow (e.g. half-days, reduced workload) and gradually increase your hours and workload if you can manage. Take breaks if you feel unwell or find it hard to concentrate. Most people are back full time in a few weeks depending on the type of work and the number of concussions they have had in the past.
- **Don’t drive unless you feel safe to drive.** If you aren’t sure, speak to your doctor.
- **Don’t drink alcohol or take sedatives until you are fully recovered**
- **Don’t use recreational drugs**
- **Relationships** can be affected if you are irritable or have mood swings. Speak to your doctor if you have concerns.
- **Sports and Leisure:** If you play sports, tell your coach/instructor/teammates about your concussion. You may require a doctor’s clearance to gradually return to sports. For more information, visit <https://parachute.ca/en/injury-topic/concussion/>