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Concussion in Sports

What is a concussion?

A concussion is an injury to the brain that can cause a variety of symptoms. It's usually caused by a blow to the head. Most of the time it doesn't involve a loss of consciousness.

Concussion in sports can happen during drills, practices and games. Injuries during practice can be just as serious as those that happen during competition.

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What are some signs of a concussion?

After a blow to the head, talk to your doctor if you have any of the following signs of concussion:

- Headache
- Vision disturbance
- Dizziness
- Loss of balance
- Confusion
- Memory loss (called amnesia)
- Ringing in the ears
- Difficulty concentrating
- Nausea
- Feeling foggy or groggy
- Sensitivity to light or noise

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How is it diagnosed?

First a doctor will examine you. The doctor will want information from people who were there when the blow to the head happened. This is very important, especially if you're confused or if you lost your memory. The doctor will test your strength, sensation, balance, reflexes and memory. In more serious cases, your doctor will want to get special x-rays of your head, called computed tomographic (CT) scans or magnetic resonance images (MRI).

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Does medicine help?

The treatment for a concussion is rest. If you have a concussion, you will need to quiet your mind as well as your body for healing to take place. If you have a headache, you can usually take

acetaminophen (brand name: Tylenol). If you've had a concussion, always ask your doctor before you take any medicine. If it's suspected you've had a concussion, your doctor may advise against taking aspirin, ibuprofen (brand names: Advil, Motrin) or other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). These medicines can increase the risk of bleeding.

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What should I watch out for?

Tell your doctor if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Stiff neck
- Difficulty walking, speaking or using your arms
- Severe headache
- Repeated vomiting
- Confusion that gets worse
- Convulsions
- Unusual sleepiness

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When can I return to sports?

If you have any of the signs or symptoms of concussion listed above after a blow to the head or body, you should not go back to play the day of the injury. A health care professional, experienced in evaluating for concussion, needs to let you know when it is safe to return to play. If your concussion involves memory loss or loss of consciousness, you may not be able to return to play for 1 to 2 weeks. After a severe concussion, you may not be able to return to play for a month. If this wasn't your first concussion, your return to play may take even longer.

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What are the risks of returning to play too early?

A player returning too early could suffer from "second impact syndrome," which can be fatal. A second blow to the head, even a minor one, can cause a loss of control of blood flow to the brain. Never return to a sports activity until you are cleared by a doctor.

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Are there any lasting effects to a concussion?

Most people get better after a concussion without any permanent damage. Some people have signs of concussion for weeks or months. Repeated concussions can cause permanent damage. After several concussions, your doctor may talk with you about changing sports.

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Other Organizations

- [American Trauma Society](http://www.amtrauma.org)
<http://www.amtrauma.org>
- [Brain Injury Association of America](http://www.biausa.org/)
<http://www.biausa.org/>

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