

SPORTS & RECREATION

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TARGET → ON SAFETY

Children's Sports Safety: Concussions

Concussions can have serious effects on the brain, especially for children. Learn how to recognize the symptoms of a concussion and the important steps you should take when addressing this serious injury.

What is a Concussion?

Popular representations of concussions can be a bit misleading. A child can suffer from a concussion without falling down or being “knocked out.”

To understand what causes a concussion, you need to understand a little bit about the brain. The brain is actually suspended, floating in spinal fluid inside of the skull. When the head is moved rapidly—either due to blunt force or a sudden whiplash-type of motion—the brain can slam against the inside of the skull. When it does, the trauma will often tear blood vessels and injure nerves—resulting in what we commonly call a “concussion.”

Concussion Prevention

While there is no way to completely eliminate concussion injuries in sports, there are a

number of proven methods for reducing the severity and frequency of concussions:

- **Enforce the rules:** Most sports have rules in place that are designed to guard athletes' heads. Make sure you enforce these rules and communicate that blows to the head will not be tolerated.
- **Helmets:** When applicable, helmets can provide an additional layer of protection to athletes. However, many athletes can gain a false sense of security from helmets. Therefore, it's important to emphasize that no helmet is concussion proof.
- **Education:** Teach children and staff to recognize the

symptoms of a concussion in themselves and others.

Concussion Symptoms

Even glancing blows can cause a concussion, so always be on the lookout for concussion symptoms. An athlete suffering from a concussion might report any of the following:

- Headache or a feeling of pressure in the head
- Nausea or vomiting
- Dizziness, light-headedness or balance problems
- Blurry vision, double vision or other vision problems
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Problems with memory or concentration
- Confusion

Unfortunately, many who are suffering concussion symptoms will not report them. In some cases, it's the confusion brought



on by the concussion itself that renders the injured child unable to articulate the problem.

Other times, children might be reluctant to report their symptoms for fear of being sidelined. That's why coaches, officials and staff need to watch for the following symptoms:

- Dazed or stunned demeanor
- Clumsy movement
- Forgetting the score, position, assignment or other information
- Answering questions slowly
- Loss of consciousness, even if brief

Suspected Concussion: What To Do

Proper medical evaluation in the event of a concussion is essential. If a child has lost consciousness while on the playing field, immediately stop play and seek medical attention. If the injury didn't result in a loss of consciousness, but you suspect that a child has suffered a concussion, remove him or her from the field of play and seek immediate medical attention.

In the event that the child loses consciousness, medical experts recommend that the child be

taken to an emergency room for evaluation. For less severe concussions, the medical examination typically takes place on-site.

Recovery

Each injury is different, so it's essential that you follow the doctor's recommended course of action. The good news is that most concussions are mild and a majority of children who suffer from them can expect to make a full recovery.

Generally speaking, there are a few things to keep in mind as a child recovers from a concussion:

- **Rest:** Resting from both physical and mental activity is one of the most important keys to recovery.
- **Take it slow:** As children recover, it's best to ease them into activities slowly, increasing duration or intensity only when they are comfortable.
- **Know when to stop:** If physical activity causes symptoms like headaches, children should stop and take a break, then resume the activity for a briefer period of time.
- **Be aware of progress:** Rarely, children who have suffered concussions can

develop more serious health problems like post-concussion syndrome. If children don't show signs of improvement or are getting worse, follow up with medical personnel.