

Concussions

Imagine a large container of gelatin that is surrounded by a special fluid and by the hard surface of the container. With most movement, the gelatin floats around without any problems. But if we violently shake the container or move it rapidly from side to side, the gelatin suddenly hits the hard sides of the container. This is what happens to the brain during a concussion.

Concussions, which can be caused by a blow to the head or by the head and upper body being violently shaken, account for about 75 percent of all traumatic brain injuries.

Symptoms of a Concussion

Most concussions don't cause a person to lose consciousness. Symptoms of milder concussions may include headaches, feeling of pressure in the head, confusion, dizziness or "seeing stars," ringing in the ears, nausea or vomiting, slurred speech and feeling tired. Some people temporarily may forget the event that caused the concussion.

Symptoms may occur hours or days after the injury, and can include:

- Difficulty remembering
- Feeling irritable, depressed or experiencing changes in emotions or mood
- Sensitivity to light and noise
- Sleep disturbances (too much or too little)
- Changes in taste and smell

Parents and caregivers may have trouble recognizing the symptoms of a concussion in infants and toddlers because they can't describe how they feel. Be alert for the child becoming more tired or listless after a head injury. Changes in a child's sleep and eating habits may be found after a concussion. You also may notice the child being very cranky or irritable, losing interest in favorite toys, or developing an unsteady walk or having difficulty with balance.

Concussions can cause serious complications and, like any head injury, should be evaluated by a doctor. If you have had a concussion, your risk of developing epilepsy doubles within the first five years of the injury. People, such as athletes, who have multiple concussions can develop lasting, progressive changes in their brains. A recent study on high school athletes who had two or more concussions found that they were more likely to have memory problems such as feeling "foggy," headaches, problems with balance or feeling dizzy and changes in sleep patterns.

Preventing Concussions

Here are some steps you can take to prevent concussions and other head injuries:

- Make sure you wear appropriate protective headgear for sports and recreational activities. Helmets should fit properly, be well-maintained and be worn correctly.
- Ensure that children play age-appropriate sports and that they know and follow the rules of the game.
- Always wear your seat belt and make sure infants, toddlers and young children are secured in an age- and weight-appropriate, approved car seat.
- Keep your home floors free of clutter that may cause someone to trip and fall.



- If you have young children, use padding around countertops and table edges. Use stairway gates to block access and install window guards.
- Use caution around swimming areas. For a first dive, always go in feet first to help protect your head and neck. Only dive into water you know is free from obstruction and that is at least 9 feet deep.
- Wear sensible shoes. High heels, sandals with thin straps and shoes that have slippery or sticky soles can cause falls.

Concussions can cause serious, lasting effects, but by taking preventive steps and seeking medical attention immediately, you can prevent or minimize the damage they can cause.