Concussion: Care Instructions

Overview

A concussion is a kind of injury to the brain. It happens when the head receives a hard blow. The impact can jar or shake the brain against the skull. This interrupts the brain's normal activities. Although you may have cuts or bruises on your head or face, you may have no other visible signs of a brain injury. In most cases, damage to the brain from a concussion can't be seen in tests such as a CT or MRI scan.

For a few weeks, you may have low energy, dizziness, trouble sleeping, a headache, ringing in your ears, or nausea. You may also feel anxious, grumpy, or depressed. You may have problems with memory and concentration. These symptoms are common after a concussion. They should slowly improve over time. Sometimes this takes weeks or even months. Someone who lives with you should know how to care for you. Please share this and all information with a caregiver who will be available to help if needed.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

Pain control

- Put ice or a cold pack on the part of your head that hurts for 10 to 20 minutes at a time. Put a thin cloth between the ice and your skin.
- Ask your doctor if you can take an over-the-counter pain medicine, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), or naproxen (Aleve). Be safe with medicines. Read and follow all instructions on the label.

Recovery

- Follow your doctor's instructions. The doctor will tell you if you need someone to watch you closely for the next 24 hours or longer.
- Rest is the best way to recover from a concussion. You need to rest your body **and** your brain:
    - Get plenty of sleep at night. And take rest breaks during the day.
    - Avoid activities that take a lot of physical or mental work. This includes housework, exercise, schoolwork, video games, text messaging, and using the computer.
    - You may need to change your school or work schedule while you recover.
    - Return to your normal activities slowly. Do not try to do too much at once.
- Do not drink alcohol or use illegal drugs. Alcohol and illegal drugs can slow your recovery. And they can increase your risk of a second brain injury.
- Avoid activities that could lead to another concussion. Follow your doctor's instructions for a gradual return to activity and sports.
- Ask your doctor when it's okay for you to drive a car, ride a bike, or operate machinery.

How should you return to activity?

Your return to activity can begin after 1 to 2 days of physical and mental rest. After resting, you can gradually increase your activity as long as it does not cause new symptoms or worsen your symptoms.

Doctors and concussion specialists suggest steps to follow for returning to sports after a concussion. Use these steps as a guide. You should slowly progress through the following levels of activity:

1. Limited activity. You can take part in daily activities as long as the activity doesn't increase your symptoms or cause new symptoms.
2. Light aerobic activity. This can include walking, swimming, or other exercise. No resistance training is included in this step.
3. Sport-specific exercise. This includes running drills or skating drills (depending on the sport), but no head impact.
4. Noncontact training drills. This includes more complex training drills such as passing. The athlete may also begin light resistance training.
5. Full-contact practice. The athlete can participate in normal training.
6. Return to normal game play. This is the final step and allows the athlete to join in normal game play.

Watch and keep track of your progress. It should take at least 6 days for you to go from light activity to normal game play.

Make sure that you can stay at each new level of activity for at least 24 hours without symptoms, or as long as your doctor says, before doing more. If one or more symptoms come back, return to a lower level of activity for at least 24 hours. Don't move on until all symptoms are gone.

When should you call for help?

Call 911 anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You have a seizure.
- You passed out (lost consciousness).
- You are confused or can't stay awake.

- You have a headache that gets worse and does not go away.
- You have new vision changes or one pupil (the black part in the middle of the eye) that is larger than the other.
- You have slurred speech, balance problems, or decreased coordination.

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- You have new or worse vomiting.
- You feel less alert.
- You have new weakness or numbness in any part of your body.
- You have new symptoms, such as unclear thinking or changes in mood.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You do not get better as expected.

Where can you learn more?

Go to https://www.healthwise.net/patiented

Enter **Z711** in the search box to learn more about **"Concussion: Care Instructions".**

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