



A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO CONCUSSION CARE

FACTS:

- A concussion is a traumatic brain injury (TBI)
- All concussions are serious
- Concussions can occur without loss of consciousness or memory
- Recognition and proper management of concussions when they first occur can prevent further injury or even death
- Most athletes can safely return to play after recovery
- Everyone recovers at their own rate
- In general, the younger the athlete is, the longer the recovery
- Both cognitive and physical rest are the key to recovery
- U.S. annual rate of sports/recreation related concussions: 3.8 million

A concussion is caused by a bump or blow (usually to the head) that is hard enough to disrupt the metabolic functioning of the brain.

It is important for athletes to report concussions because the cumulative effects of repeated concussions can result in permanent intellectual and cognitive changes.

Youth athletes are more vulnerable to the effects of concussion, and their amount of time needed to recover is often longer than full-grown adults.

Rest is the best treatment after a concussion as it helps the brain heal faster. If the athlete is still symptomatic, forcing him or her to exert either any other activities that require sustained mental exertion, from test-taking to playing video games.

Once an athlete is 100% symptom free at rest, a gradual return-to-play protocol should be implemented to be sure that symptoms do not resurface with exertion. No athlete should ever return to play if concussion symptoms recur.

Management of concussion in youth is very important to prevent a rare but often fatal brain injury called Second Impact Syndrome. This syndrome may occur when an athlete suffers even a mild concussion and then, within a short period of time, receives a second blow to the head before he or she has fully recovered. Rapid brain swelling can occur as the brain has not yet healed from the first hit. Increased intracranial pressure, if uncontrolled, can lead to death or severe neurological damage.

WHAT SHOULD I BE LOOKING FOR?

To recognize a possible concussion, teachers should watch for any change in the student's behavior, thinking and/or physical functioning associated with a collision, fall or forceful movement of the head.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Signs Observed by Parents & Teachers:

- Appears dazed or stunned
- Seems inattentive or makes careless mistakes
- Looks tired or sleepy
- Winces at bright lights or promethium boards
- Poor recall, slower test-taking
- Trouble keeping up with notes
- Complains of headache
- Head down on desk
- Worsening of symptoms during the day

Symptoms Reported by Students:

- Headache or pressure in head
- Nausea or vomiting
- Double or blurry vision
- Sensitive to lights or noises
- Dizziness, clumsiness, sleepiness
- Feels sluggish, hazy, foggy, groggy
- Attention or concentration problems
- Confusion or memory loss
- Just doesn't feel right



CONCUSSION INSTITUTE

Gwinnett Medical Center – Duluth

HOW CAN STUDENTS HEAL FROM A CONCUSSION?

There is no substitute for absolute rest — resting the brain to promote recovery.

There is also no right answer for everyone as to when to return to school, but students should remain home until they are able to attend class(es), even with accommodations, without a worsening of symptoms. If symptoms worsen during the day, allow them to rest (or go home) until they abate. Partial days may need to be considered.

Everyone recovers at their own rate, but the amount of time needed to recover can be impacted by a variety of factors. Pushing students to do too much too soon only slows, and prolongs, the recovery process.

HOW CAN I HELP MY STUDENT RECOVER FROM A CONCUSSION?

Students with symptoms and/or neuropsychological dysfunction after a concussion often need support to perform school-related activities. The teaching team should work collaboratively with the student and parents to develop an accommodation plan to prioritize classes and assignments during the student's recovery period — and to develop a plan for a gradual return to the classroom and a full workload. In most cases, a formal 504 Plan isn't needed.

Just as we recommend a gradual return to sport, a gradual return to the classroom is sometimes needed. Many students with a concussion report increased problems paying attention or concentrating, needing more time to complete tasks or assignments, increased problems remembering or learning new information, greater irritability and less tolerance for frustration, and a worsening of symptoms when completing schoolwork. School personnel should watch for these symptoms during classes and suggest rest breaks when observed. Rest can include resting in/during class, or lying down in a quiet room.

- Consider modifications to classwork, assignments and tests in order to lighten cognitive load, such as assistance with note-taking, outlines vs. full reports, oral vs. written exams, dark glasses, shortened assignments, etc.
- Avoid testing if at all possible. If not possible, provide testing accommodations to minimize the impact of concussive symptoms (such as extra breaks, reduced distractions, preferential scheduling and extended time).
- Encourage use of elevators, and changing classes just before or after the period ends to avoid loud, busy hallways.
- Participation in band/choir should be suspended until symptoms abate significantly.
- There is no return to sport (including PE) until students are 100% symptom free at rest, with a full cognitive (academic) load.
- Significant symptoms at the end of the day are often an indication of over-exertion during the day. As recovery continues, students can increase the length of time working without a break, and supports and accommodations can be gradually withdrawn. Check-in often with your student, and do not wait for him/her to complain of symptoms. Instead of asking "How are you?", ask about the presence of specific symptoms such as headache, fatigue, sensitivity to lights, and if symptoms are getting any worse, or better. Recommend breaks if symptoms worsen or recur, and notify parents.

ABOUT THE CONCUSSION INSTITUTE

We opened the Concussion Institute at GMC–Duluth because concussions are an all too common occurrence among athletes—especially our student-athletes. We also realized there was not another facility like it in Georgia or the Southeast.

Concussions may be common, but they don't need to be game-changers. With the latest methods, we are committed to improving concussion treatment for athletes of all ages and levels of play—from youth leagues to the collegiate and professional ranks. We're doing this by increasing awareness of the signs and symptoms of concussions and other head trauma, as well as providing state-of-the-art diagnostic and treatment approaches.



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