



An Athlete's Guide to Concussions

The Concussion Center at Nationwide Children's wants you to be aware of concussions and the potential dangers to athletes in any sport. Safety begins by educating yourself!

What Is a Concussion and How Do I Get One?

A **concussion** is an invisible injury that temporarily changes how the brain works. A concussion may be caused by a blow, bump, or jolt to the head or by any fall or hit that jars the brain. While a blow to the head may not seem like a big deal, concussion symptoms can develop upon impact or up to 1-2 days after the incident.

If I Don't Get "Knocked Out," I Don't Have a Concussion, Right?

Wrong! Ninety percent of concussions do **Not** involve being "knocked out." Every concussion is serious because every concussion is a brain injury.

How Do I Know if I Have a Concussion?

If you've suffered a blow to the head or a hard, jarring impact to your body, ask yourself these questions:

- Do I have a headache?
- Am I dizzy or having trouble maintaining my balance?
- Do I feel sick to my stomach or have I thrown up?
- Do I feel drowsy and tired?
- Do lights or noises bother me?
- Am I having trouble remembering things?
- Am I having trouble concentrating?
- Does it feel like everything is slowed down?
- Do I feel like I can't think clearly?

If you answer **Yes** to any of these questions - even one - then you need to protect yourself by taking the steps below.



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What Do I Do if I Think I Have a Concussion?

1. **Stop!** Whether it's a game, practice or just playing with friends, stop participating immediately! You could be putting yourself at risk of permanent injury or death if you play through it.
2. **Tell someone!** Tell your coach, athletic trainer or your parent(s). Be honest about how you feel.
3. **Don't return to play!** Do not return to your sport until you have permission to do so by a medical professional, such as a doctor or certified athletic trainer.

Is It Dangerous if I Keep Playing When I Have a Concussion?

Yes! If you play through a concussion, you could be putting yourself at risk for second impact syndrome. If you get hit in the head again before your first concussion heals, you could collapse and end up with brain damage, in a wheelchair, or dead. No game or practice is worth the risk.

After a Concussion, When Do I Get To Go back to Sports?

You have to wait until your symptoms go away, you can complete your schoolwork, AND a healthcare professional (like a doctor or an athletic trainer) says it is okay for you to start participating in your sport.

You will need to complete the gradual return-to-play progression. This progression is important and should not be skipped. If your symptoms come back during the progression, then you are not ready to return.

We know waiting to get better is boring. Many athletes feel pressured to say they do not have symptoms even if they still do. This is very dangerous and could result in serious consequences. Be honest and protect yourself and your brain.

What Can I Do To Make Myself Better Faster?

Avoid intense physical activity like push-ups, running, sport-specific activities, etc. until told to do so by a medical professional. Light physical activity, such as going for walks, is ok if not causing a significant increase in symptoms.

- Avoid screen time for the first 24-48 hours (including computer use, television, video games, texting).
- Avoid dances, pep rallies and assemblies if they make your symptoms worse.
- Keep a regular sleep schedule at night, drink plenty of water, and eat a healthy diet.
- Follow your doctor or athletic trainer's recommendations.

If I get a concussion, how will it affect school?

If not feeling well, you may take 1-2 days off school. When you return to school, some concussion symptoms may affect your ability to do well in class. Therefore, you should tell your teachers about your concussion right away and let them know if you need help.

How Can I Keep Myself From Getting a Concussion?

- Wear equipment that fits properly and is checked and maintained regularly (if applicable).
- Follow the rules of your sport and practice good sportsmanship.
- Listen to your coaches and practice good technique.

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