

How to Care for Your Child with a Head Injury or Concussion

This leaflet will provide you with information about head injury and concussion causes, symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, and home care advice.



Head injury in children is common. Most head injuries are not serious

Head injuries are classified as:

- Mild – this can be managed at home
- Moderate and Severe injuries- your child needs to see a doctor

What are the common causes of head injury?

Head injuries are commonly caused by:

- falls
- motor vehicle accidents
- a sports-related injury
- physical abuse

What is a concussion?

A concussion is a term of a mild form of traumatic brain injury and is common in children during sports activities.

What are the symptoms of head injury or concussion?

- **Scalp swelling:** this is common because the scalp has many small blood vessels that can bleed.
- **Loss of consciousness:** usually just for a brief period of less than one minute
- **Headache:** This may be in the form of irritability (bad temper) or other discomforts in children who are too young to speak.
- **Vomiting:** Children who vomit after a head injury do not necessarily have a serious brain injury unless vomiting is repeated
- **Seizure:** Not all children who have a seizure will have a serious head injury

Common symptoms of a concussion include:

- Headache
- Mild confusion
- Nausea (feeling sick) or vomiting
- Dizziness
- Fatigue and tiredness
- Inability to concentrate
- sudden changes in behavior
- bothered by bright light or loud noises
- Disturbance of sleep pattern
- Amnesia (temporary memory loss, not being able to remember events around the time of the injury)

How is a head injury or concussion diagnosed?

- The doctor will ask a few questions about your child's health and examine your child to determine the seriousness of the injury.
- The doctor will advise you if further investigations are required
- Most children with concussion do not need x-rays, CT-scan or MRI
- Even with a normal brain CT or MRI, your child can still have a concussion

How is a head injury or concussion treated?

- Your child's doctor will decide the suitable treatment based on the clinical assessment, the seriousness of the injury and the outcome of the observation period.
- Most of the time, a period of watching the child for 4-6 hours is all that is needed. If your child develops any symptoms of concerns during this period, then the doctor will decide about further testing and imaging.
- Children are at very low risk of having serious brain injury if they remain well more than 12 hours after the head injury.

Home care advice

Most children with a minor head injury can be safely watched at home; here are a few things that you can do at home to help your child

- A mild headache, dizziness, and nausea are common, especially during the first 48 hours after the injury.
- Make sure your child is cared for by a responsible adult for at least 48 hours.

Pain relief medicine:

- Your child may have a headache or soreness around the injured area. You can give your child:
 - o Paracetamol (any brand) or Ibuprofen (any brand)
 - o Follow the instruction on the medicine package for the correct dose for your child
 - o Do not give your child Aspirin as this can cause serious complications

Feeding:

- If the child is nauseous or has vomited once, try offering clear liquids such as soft drinks, clear juice

Rest

- Encourage your child to lie down or choose a quiet activity.
- Your child can sleep. It is not dangerous to sleep after a minor head injury. Sleep is an important part of the brain's recovery from a concussion and will help your child to feel better.
- It is not usually necessary to wake your child from sleep after a minor head injury.
- If your doctor recommends waking the child, he or she should be able to wake up and recognize his/ her surroundings and parent/caretaker
- Avoid television, mobile phones, tablets, or computer games until your child is symptoms free.

Bleeding

If there is a skin wound:

- Apply pressure to the bleeding area with a clean cloth do not put coffee or any other household material in the wound
- Bleeding should stop within 10 minutes.

Swelling

- Swelling (a large lump or "goose egg") is also common after a head injury this is because the scalp is rich with blood supply.
- To reduce the swelling, you can apply ice or a cold pack to the area for 20 minutes.
- The swelling may take up to one week to completely disappear
- Return to play
- A serious brain injury may occur if your child has a second head injury within a short time after the first injury.
- Please confirm with your doctor if your child can return to active play or sports.
- If your child had concussion, do not allow your child to return to exercise until their symptoms have been reevaluated by a healthcare professional

When to go to the Emergency Department?

You should go to the emergency department if your child:

- Fell from a height taller than 1 to 1.5 meters
- Is younger than six months old
- Becomes more and more drowsy and/or difficult to wake up
- Vomits more than twice or continue to vomit four to six hours after the injury
- Has a seizure
- Passes out
- Has a really bad headache that is getting worse over time
- Has trouble walking, talking, or seeing
- Seems confused
- Acts in a way that worries you
- Has dizziness that does not go away or comes back repeatedly
- Has blood or watery fluid coming out of the nose or ears
- Has a cut that keeps bleeding after you put pressure on it for 10 minutes
- Is weak or numb in any body part
- Is very cranky and irritable or can't stop crying (younger children)
- Has a wound that needs attention