

# Frequently Asked Questions and Concussion Facts

## What Is a Concussion?

A concussion is a brain injury in which trauma to the head results in a temporary disruption of normal brain function. The injury occurs when a person's brain is violently rocked back and forth or twisted inside the skull as a result of a direct or indirect force. A concussion disturbs brain activity and should be handled as a serious injury. Proper healing and recovery time following a concussion are crucial in preventing further injury.

A person who is not fully recovered from an initial concussion is significantly vulnerable for recurrent, cumulative, and even catastrophic consequences of a second concussive injury. Such difficulties are prevented if the person is allowed time to recover from a concussion. For athletes, return-to-play decisions should be carefully made. No athlete should return to sport or other at-risk participation when symptoms of a concussion are present and recovery is ongoing.

## Concussion Facts:

- A person does not have to lose consciousness (be "knocked-out") to suffer a concussion
- A concussion is a traumatic injury to the brain
- Concussion symptoms may last for several weeks, even months, following the injury
- Concussions can cause symptoms that interfere with school, work, and social life
- Special football helmets, soccer head gear, and mouth guards have not been scientifically proven to prevent concussions
- An athlete should not return to sports while still experiencing symptoms of a concussion, as they are at risk for prolonging symptoms and further injury

## What Are the Symptoms of a Concussion?

A concussion may cause multiple symptoms. Many symptoms appear immediately after the injury, while others can develop over the following days or weeks. The symptoms may be subtle and are often difficult to fully recognize. It is not unusual for symptoms to worsen with physical activity. In many cases, even simple things, such as going to school or reading a book, may worsen symptoms.

Some common symptoms include:

- Headache
- Difficulty concentrating
- Easily confused
- Slowed thought processes
- Difficulty with memory

- Nausea
- Lack of energy, fatigue
- Dizziness, poor balance, lightheadedness
- Blurred vision
- Sensitivity to light and sound
- Poor sleep
- Mood changes (irritable, anxious, or sad)

The key to recovery is cognitive and physical rest. Cognitive rest is avoidance of mental challenges that could make your symptoms worse.

## **What Should Be Done When an Athlete Has Suffered a Concussion?**

- All athletes who sustain a concussion need a medical evaluation by a physician. If the concussed athlete is vomiting, suffering a severe headache, having difficulty staying awake or answering simple questions, he or she should be taken to a local emergency department.
- If one is a participant in Club sports you will need to be evaluated in Health Services prior to returning to play.

Diagnostic testing, which includes CT and MRI, may be needed. While these are helpful in identifying life-threatening brain injuries, such as a skull fracture, hematoma, or a contusion, they are typically normal even in athletes who have sustained a severe concussion.

## **How Long Do the Symptoms of a Concussion Usually Last?**

The symptoms of a concussion will usually go away within 5 to 7 days of the initial injury. However, in some cases, symptoms may last for several weeks or even months. Symptoms such as headaches, memory problems, poor concentration, and mood changes can interfere with school, work, and social interactions. The potential for such long-term symptoms indicates the need for careful management of all concussions.

## **How Many Concussions Can an Athlete Have Before He or She Should Stop Playing Sports?**

There is no “magic number” of concussions that determines when an athlete should give up playing contact or collision sports. The circumstances surrounding each individual injury, such as mechanism of injury and length of symptoms following the concussion, are very important and must be considered when assessing an athlete's risk for further, and potentially more serious, concussions. The decision to “retire” from sports can only be reached following a thorough review of the athlete’s concussion history, coupled with a thorough and frank discussion between the treating physician and the athlete and his or her parents.