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If you experience any head trauma, whether or not you experience symptoms, go to your ER immediately or see your primary care physician.



Check with your doctor before embarking on any new exercise program.

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What Is a Concussion?

A concussion is a form of brain injury that is often temporary but can affect concentration, memory, sleep and balance.

Causes & Symptoms

Concussions may be caused by sports injuries, motor vehicle or bicycle accidents, and falls, and can occur from direct hits to the head or forces transmitted through the body. This can result in a number of non-specific symptoms that may not appear immediately, thus making diagnosis difficult at times. Symptoms may include confusion, dizziness, amnesia, headache that worsens over time, nausea, vomiting, ringing in ears, fatigue, feeling dazed or foggy, vision changes, sleep disturbance, irritability and generally “not being yourself” within days of the traumatic event.

Diagnosis

Concussions can be especially difficult to diagnose in children since they are often not able to describe what or how they feel. For various reasons, girls may have increased and longer lasting symptoms. Emerald Lin, MD, Assistant Attending Physiatrist, recommends immediate removal from the activity or sport if there is any suspicion of a concussion, followed by prompt evaluation by a primary care physician or specialist in concussion management. Your child may be referred for further evaluation by a physical therapist who can test his or her balance and coordination. A neuropsychologist can also be helpful in neurocognitive evaluations and administering tests that can pick up subtle changes. CT and MRI scans are usually not helpful in diagnosis of concussion, but can help rule out a significant injury such as a brain bleed and/or fracture of the skull. Regarding children and adolescents, as per NYS Concussion Management and Awareness Act (CMAA) law, children may not return to play the same day and there must be written clearance by a physician for return to activity/sport.

“Concussion guidelines are meant to help keep adults and children safe, but these guidelines should not, outside of an injury, be a reason to keep us from playing sports and exercising. The long-term health risks of a sedentary lifestyle can be more detrimental.”

—Emerald Lin, MD, Assistant Attending Physiatrist, HSS



Treatments

- Your physician will prescribe both physical and cognitive rest (perhaps taking a break from work, school, computer, TV, phone, games) in order to heal.
- Vision therapy, physical therapy, and neuropsychological evaluation and treatment may be prescribed to help you get back to your level of functioning prior to injury.
- Rest for 24–48 hours before limited return/increase in cognitive and physical activities.*
- School-aged children should return to the classroom before returning formally to physical activities.*
- Resuming recreational activity or sports too quickly can put you at risk for another concussion when you are not yet recovered fully, which in severe cases may lead to a fatal brain injury.

Prevention

It is important to be aware of age and size guidelines for children in contact sports. Young children should be developed enough to participate safely. For both children and adults, education for proper technique and using correct safety equipment in sports and activities is important.

*The Berlin Consensus Statement on Concussion in Sport (2016), comprised of an international expert panel, provides guideline recommendations for the improvement of safety and health of athletes for diagnosis, management and prevention of sport related concussions.

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