



Concussions: What You Need to Know

Concussions, like sprains or broken bones, are not uncommon in sports. But that doesn't mean they should not be taken seriously. A concussion is actually a mild traumatic brain injury, or mTBI, in which some kind of head or body trauma causes the head and brain to move rapidly back and forth. This sudden movement can cause damage to the brain cells and create chemical changes in the brain.

Because concussions are usually not life threatening, they are classified as "mild" brain injuries. However, if a concussion is not recognized and managed properly, it can lead to serious consequences, including brain damage and even death.

The symptoms of a concussion can be physical, cognitive, and/or behavioral. If one or more of these signs and symptoms are present, a concussion should be suspected and the appropriate management strategy put into effect.

Each individual concussion is different, and symptoms vary. What's more, symptoms may occur immediately or evolve over several hours after the initial trauma. That's why it's so important for athletes, student athletes, parents, and coaches to know the signs and symptoms of a concussion.

To learn more about MarinHealthSM Medical Center's Athletic Training Program visit us online at www.mymarinhealth.org/athletics.

Signs and Symptoms of Concussions

Physical Symptoms

- Headache
- Sensation of pressure in the head
- Neck pain
- Nausea or vomiting
- Dizziness
- Blurred vision
- Balance problems
- Sensitivity to light and noise

Cognitive Symptoms

- Feeling slowed down
- Feeling like "in a fog"
- Not "feeling right"
- Difficulty concentrating and/or remembering

Behavioral Symptoms

- Fatigue or low energy
- Confusion
- Drowsiness
- Trouble falling asleep
- Appearing unusually emotional
- Irritability
- Sadness
- Nervousness or anxiousness



When to Seek Immediate Medical Attention

Concussions should always be taken seriously, but certain signs and symptoms call for immediate medical attention. In the first 24 hours, a concussion is an evolving injury. Symptoms and/or cognitive issues might appear right away, or they could be delayed for several hours after the initial event.

Parents and/or teammates of an athlete suspected of sustaining a concussion need to be able to recognize the red flags, listed below, that warrant immediate evaluation and care.

CALL 911

- Seizure (uncontrolled jerking of arms/legs)
- Loss of consciousness for more than a minute
- Non-responsive/appears very drowsy
- Drainage of blood/fluid from ears or nose
- Loss of bowel and/or bladder control
- Signs/symptoms of a more severe injury

TAKE THE PERSON TO THE NEAREST EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

- Can't recognize people or places
- Weakness or numbness of arms/legs
- Repeated vomiting
- Increased confusion and/or irritability
- Unusual behavior
- Lack of balance/unsteadiness on feet
- Vision disturbances (double or blurry vision)
- Slurred speech



Sideline Evaluation and Diagnosis

If an athlete has suffered a suspected concussion, he or she should be immediately removed from play and examined by someone trained in recognizing and evaluating a concussion. This could be a Certified Athletic Trainer (ATC), physician, specially trained coach, or nurse. Evaluation should include the use of tests such as the Sideline Concussion Assessment Tool, 3rd version (SCAT3) — a standardized tool for evaluating injured athletes ages 13 and older for concussion. In a sporting situation, asking about the events just before and after the fall or hit has been shown to be a more reliable memory assessment than the standard orientation questions (where are we, who are you, what's the date and time).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website is a great resource for more information on concussions. Visit them online at www.cdc.gov/headsup.