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Concussion Care

What is a concussion? A concussion is a brain injury that is caused by a blow/impact to the head or body that results in an accelerated angular (shear) force to your head and neck. This force can occur many ways such as contact from another player, hitting a hard surface like the ground or floor, being hit by a piece of equipment, or a car wreck. A concussion can change the way your brain functions. Concussion symptoms can range from mild to severe and may present very differently with each individual. **90% of all concussions do not include loss of consciousness.**

What are the symptoms of a concussion? No imaging study can confirm a concussion. Some patients develop signs and symptoms immediately after an injury, while others may develop symptoms hours to days later. Symptoms vary for each patient but may include: amnesia, confusion, headache, feeling fatigued or groggy, change in sleeping patterns (sleeping more or less), nausea, vomiting, nervousness/anxiety, irritability, sadness, double or blurry vision, slurred speech, troubles concentrating and remembering, sensitivity to light or noise, slowed reaction time.

Things you should watch out for in the first 24 hours after an injury. The following are RED FLAG symptoms that indicate the individual needs to be evaluated immediately: Persistent or projectile vomiting, unequal pupil size, difficulty being aroused, increasing confusion, slurred speech, worsening headache, development of weakness or numbness, clear or bloody discharge from the ear or nose, seizure activity, loss of consciousness.

How to recover from a concussion? After a head injury the brain needs time to heal and REST is the key. Rest means getting enough sleep and taking a break from physical activity. For the first 48-72 hours it is really important to avoid TV, video games, reading more than 15 minutes at a time, loud music/noises, cell phones, internet. Depending on the patient's presentation we may recommend time off of work or school. Full recovery is important because getting another concussion while you are still symptomatic increases your chance of a more severe concussion and potential long term symptoms. Also avoid caffeine and alcohol.

Multiple concussions. Many studies have shown the dangers of multiple concussions, including 5-6 times the risk of developing depression, learning disorders, early onset dementia, and chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE). Having a previous concussion could cause prolonged recovery time and could be related to more severe symptoms. If you have more than 3 concussions, many experts recommend considering retirement from contact and collision sports.