

# UniversityHealthServices

*We heal. We educate. We care.*

## HEAD INJURIES

Fortunately, few head injuries are serious. Nevertheless, bleeding inside the skull from head trauma can occur. Internal bleeding puts pressure on the brain and can lead to severe impairment. Your clinician determines your risk for serious internal injury through questions and examination. If you are at low risk for internal injury, you will be sent home. If your head injury was more serious, your clinician will put you in a hospital for observation. Even if you are sent home, you should not be left alone. You should be watched by a responsible adult.

### What is a concussion?

A concussion is an injury to the brain that is caused by a blow to the head. After a concussion, the brain doesn't work right for a while. Concussion can cause a person to be "knocked out" (unconscious) or to have memory loss (amnesia). A concussion can be dangerous even if the person isn't knocked out.

### Risk Increases with:

- Excessive alcohol consumption
- High-risk sports- especially football and boxing
- Seizure Disorders
- Bicycle or motorcycle riding without a helmet

### Is a concussion serious?

Any concussion can be dangerous because it affects the brain. The longer the patient is unconscious or the longer the memory loss lasts, the more serious the concussion. You can have a serious concussion even without losing consciousness or having a cut or swelling on your head where you were struck.

### What should I watch for?

If the following symptoms develop, obtain medical assistance:

- Vomiting more than twice
- Severe headache that won't ease up or go away, even after a dose of acetaminophen
- Confusion
- Restlessness or irritability
- Pupils of different sizes
- Convulsions or seizures
- Trouble using arms or legs
- Temperature above 100.5F
- Very stiff neck
- Garbled speech
- Bleeding from the nose or ears
- Unusual sleepiness or decreased alertness

### Is it okay to sleep?

You might become sleepy after a concussion. This sleepiness may be caused by the activity that caused you to get the concussion or it may be caused by the concussion itself. It's perfectly all right for you to go to sleep as long as a responsible person wakes you up every two hours to be sure you are easy to wake. You should be able to recognize this person and tell them such things as your birthday, age, and telephone number. If you can't be easily awakened or don't answer the questions correctly, the person should seek medical attention.

### How long should I be observed?

You should be observed (watched) for 24 hours. Most serious problems showed up on the first 24 hours after the concussion.

### **May I take something for pain?**

Only if your clinician tells you to. You may take 2 tablets every 4 hours of acetaminophen (Tylenol). Do not take aspirin or ibuprofen since these medications inhibit the ability of blood to clot and could result in bleeding. A light diet is recommended.

### **Are there any lasting after-effects from a concussion?**

Concussions are usually not serious, but they can result in permanent damage to the brain and can even cause death. Some people will have headache, dizziness, fatigue, irritability, and impaired memory and concentration for up to 6 months after a concussion.

### **When can I return to sports or work?**

The more severe the concussion, the longer you must stay away from sports or work. Here are some general guidelines:

- If you just had a very mild concussion, you may be able to return to normal activities within 20 to 30 minutes.
- If you were knocked out or had memory loss, you may not be able to return to sports or work for one week.
- If you had severe concussion, you may not be able to play sports for at least one month. You'll have to stay away from sports much longer if this was your second or third concussion.
- To help prevent acute swelling of the brain, it is critical that you avoid any repeat injury to the head for minimum of two full weeks.

### **Test Results and Advice Nurse**

Please call the nurse for test results and advice: 863-4463

### **Appointments**

Appointments can be made in person or by phone. If you are unable to keep your appointment, please call and cancel. Otherwise you will be charged for the visit.

To schedule or cancel appointments, call: 863-0774

For more information about health care issues, visit the UHS Web site at [www.sa.psu.edu/uhs](http://www.sa.psu.edu/uhs)

This publication is available in alternative media on request.

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