

Recovery After a Concussion or Mild Brain Injury



Allina Health

Concussion

A concussion is a blow to your head that affects how your brain works. You cannot see it, but it can cause changes in your behavior, thinking, and physical actions. These changes are not life-threatening but may affect your daily activities.

Concussions are difficult to diagnose as there are no specific tests to detect signs of injury.

Treatment

Rest is the best thing you can do for treating a concussion. Just as you rest your body to heal after a physical injury, you need to rest your brain to heal after a concussion.

Cognitive rest allows your brain to heal by preventing it from working too hard. This does not mean that you should sleep all of the time. It is important to find a balance between resting, doing light activities and sleeping.

Use the following guidelines to reduce your headaches or other symptoms after a concussion.

Call your health care provider if:

- your symptoms do not slowly improve
- your symptoms have not fully resolved within 4 weeks of your injury
- you have new symptoms
- you have questions or concerns.

Manage your stress

- Find ways to avoid or decrease your stress. Work on the things that are most within your control.
- Try relaxation techniques such as meditation or deep breathing to decrease stress.
- Avoid situations that make you feel anxious or emotionally drained.

Get enough sleep

- Try to go to bed and wake up at the same times during the week. Your time can vary by 1 hour for the weekends.
- Try to get at least 8 hours of sleep each night.
- Avoid taking naps unless you took naps before your head injury. Do not nap longer than 20 minutes.

Food

- Eat 3 meals a day. Try not to snack a lot during the day.
- Do not skip meals.
- Eat meals at the same time every day.
- Eat healthful foods.

Drink lots of water

- Drink lots of water each day to stay hydrated (to help keep your body working).
- Do not drink energy drinks.

Get regular exercise

- Get exercise every day. It is important after a concussion. Talk with your health care provider about what exercise is good for you.
- If you cannot do 20 to 30 minutes of exercise at one time, try to do some exercise for 5 to 10 minutes several times each day.
- Call your health care provider if you have new symptoms or if your current symptoms get worse.

What Activities You Should Avoid

You cannot “turn off” your brain but you can avoid certain activities to help it to rest. Avoid doing the following activities to give your brain a break:

- texting
- looking at screens (computers, TVs, cell phones) for more than 20 minutes at a time
- playing video games
- writing
- going out with friends

- reading difficult books
- doing puzzles or solving word games
- listening to loud music
- doing other activities that require a lot of thinking and focus.

Things to Watch for at Home

Symptoms from a concussion can occur right away, or hours or days later.

Call your health care provider or have someone take you to the nearest hospital Emergency Department if you have any of the following:

- vomiting (throwing up) that will not stop
- severe headache or a headache that gets worse
- not able to stay awake during times you would normally be awake
- feeling more confused and restless
- seizures
- change in your balance or ability to walk
- new problems with your vision.

Rehabilitation

Courage Kenny Rehabilitation Institute offers therapies to help you recover from your concussion. Your treatment options may include:

- physical therapy
- occupational therapy
- speech language pathology.

Physical therapy

A physical therapist will test for and treat dizziness, balance and neck problems caused from your injury. He or she will focus on retraining your brain and body and teach you exercises to help you heal and return to your daily activities.

Occupational therapy

An occupational therapist will test for and correct vision issues and work on ways to increase your independence with daily living skills including work or school, driving and leisure activities. He or she will also test you for sensory issues that can cause over- or under-stimulation during these activities.

Speech language pathology

A speech therapist will test for and treat memory, attention, concentration, language and problem-solving skills. He or she can also help improve your memory or speech difficulties.

Follow-up Care

If you or someone you love has any of the symptoms listed in this booklet after having an injury to the head, an undiagnosed mild brain injury or concussion may be the cause.

Call your health care provider right away.

Call your doctor or health care provider if you need guidance on when you may return to work, sport or activity, or driving.

Other Resources

- **Allina Health**
allinahealth.org/concussion
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
Traumatic Brain Injury**
cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury
- **Minnesota Brain Injury Alliance**
braininjurymn.org



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