

## What is a Concussion? Answers for Parents

### What is a concussion?

A concussion is a mild injury to the brain that temporarily disrupts how the brain normally works. Concussions are caused by a direct or indirect blow or jolt to the head OR body. Concussions can occur even when a child does not lose consciousness. While some children experience symptoms immediately, others may not notice them for days or months after the injury, or until the person starts resuming their everyday life and more demands are placed upon them.

### What are the symptoms of a concussion?

While most young people recover from a single concussion, everyone's recovery is unique. In general, recovery may be slower among older adults, young children, and teens. Those who have had a concussion in the past are also at risk of having another one and may find that it takes longer to recover if they have another concussion.

Symptoms of concussion usually fall into four categories:

#### Thinking / Remembering

- Difficulty thinking clearly
- Feeling slowed down or "mentally foggy"
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty remembering new information

#### Physical

- Headache
- Fuzzy or blurry vision
- Nausea or vomiting
- Dizziness or balance problems
- Sensitivity to noise or light
- Feeling tired, having no energy

#### Emotional / Mood

- Irritability
- Sadness
- More emotional
- Feeling nervous
- Depression

#### Sleep

- Sleeping more than usual
- Sleeping less than usual
- Trouble falling asleep
- Feeling fatigued or drowsy

### What can you do to help your child get better?

1. Take it easy! **Rest is very important after concussion because it helps the brain to heal.** Ignoring symptoms often makes them worse. Be patient because healing takes time.
  - a. Physical rest
    - i. Be sure your child gets enough sleep at night-no late nights. Keep the same bedtime weekdays and weekends.
    - ii. Your child should take daytime naps or rest breaks when you feel tired or fatigued.
    - iii. Limit physical activity, including PE, sports practices, weight-training, running, exercising, & heavy lifting.
  - b. Cognitive rest
    - i. In the first few days after the injury, your child should stay home and not return to school until symptoms are resolved.
    - ii. Rest from texting, email, computer time, phone calls, loud music/TV/movies and video games.
    - iii. Rest from intense studying and reading

## Your child may do these things:

- Read easy books
- Rest in a quiet room without bright lights
- Listen to music at a low volume
- Do simple arts and crafts
- Have short visits with 1-2 friends
- Play non-violent video games for short periods
- Use the computer to check their *Facebook*
- Watch TV shows for short periods that do not require a lot of focus, such as cartoons or comedies
- Watch low key sports on TV

## Do NOT let your child do these things:

- Read difficult books or do word puzzles
- Do things that need a lot of focus or thinking
- Play loud music
- Send or read text messages
- Have too many visitors
- Play video games for long periods
- Play loud video games with action and flashing lights
- Use the computer for more than 30 minutes at a time
- Watch loud TV shows with action or require focus

## When can my child return to school?

Every child is different in terms of recovery. Only when symptoms have reduced significantly, in consultation with your health care professional, should your child slowly and gradually return to daily activities. If your child is still having symptoms of concussion, she may need extra help to perform school-related activities. As the symptoms decrease during recovery, the extra help or supports can be removed gradually. Inform the teacher(s), school nurse, school psychologist, or guidance counselor about your child's injury symptoms. School personnel should be instructed to watch for:

- Increased problems paying attention or concentrating
- Increased problems remembering or learning new information
- Longer time needed to complete tasks or assignments
- Greater irritability, less able to cope with stress
- Symptoms worsen (e.g., headache, tiredness) when doing schoolwork

## When can my child go back to sports safely?

Once all of the symptoms are gone, a doctor should evaluate your child and determine readiness to return to sports.

## Visit the doctor or go the Emergency Room IMMEDIATELY, if your child is experiencing:

- Increasing confusion (cannot recognize people or places)
- Severe, worsening or persistent headache
- Multiple vomiting episodes
- Difficulty waking up
- Trouble walking
- Seizure
- Strange behavior
- Weakness
- Loss of or sudden change in vision
- One pupil is larger than the other
- Losing consciousness

## What should you do if you have questions about your child's injury?

**You should call your child's primary doctor, who can discuss symptoms and help you create a plan. If you have further questions after seeing your child's primary care doctor, please call Tampa General Hospital's Pediatric Trauma Department at 813-844-4148 or the Pediatric Neuropsychologist, Dr. Jennifer McCain, at 813-844-4251.**