

“I’m hearing a lot about concussions in the news. What should I know about them?”

A concussion is a type of brain injury. It can be caused by a bump, blow or jolt to the head or body. Any injury to the head can disrupt the normal function of the brain.



There are many ways to get a concussion. Some common ways include playing sports, falls, playground injuries, car crashes and bike accidents. Although there may be cuts or bruises on the head or face, there may be no other visible signs of a brain injury.

It is not always easy to know if someone has a concussion

You don’t have to pass out or lose consciousness to have a concussion. Symptoms can range from mild to severe and may last for hours, days, weeks or even months. Symptoms of a concussion may include:

- Having problems thinking clearly or remembering
- Feeling like you’re slowing down or lacking energy
- Not being able to concentrate
- Nausea and vomiting
- Headache or feeling pressure in your head
- Ringing in your ears
- Fuzzy or blurry vision
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Balance problems
- Slurred speech
- Having personality or mood changes

Concussions in young children and older adults

Children: Sometimes it can be hard to tell if a small child has a concussion. Children may have symptoms like crying more than usual, changes in the way they play or act, changes in the way they nurse, eat or sleep. They may also show a loss of new skills, such as toilet training, or a lack of interest in their usual activities or favorite toys. See a doctor right away if you notice any signs of a concussion.

Older adults: Concussions in older adults can be dangerous. If you are caring for an older adult who takes a blood thinner and who had a fall, take them to a doctor right away, even if you don’t see any symptoms of a concussion.

Diagnosing a concussion

If a doctor thinks that you have a concussion, they will ask questions about the injury. Your doctor may test your ability to pay attention, and evaluate your learning and memory function. They may also check your strength, balance, coordination, reflexes and sensation. Sometimes a doctor will order imaging tests, such as a CT scan or an MRI, to make sure your brain is not bruised or bleeding.

Recovery and treatment

The amount of time it takes to recover from a concussion varies. After a concussion, the brain is more sensitive to damage, and rest is the best way to recover. Get plenty of sleep at night, avoid alcohol and illegal drugs, and do not take any medication unless your doctor says it is okay. Allow yourself time to get better, and slowly return to your regular activities. You may need to change your school or work schedule while you recover. If your symptoms come back when you're engaged in an activity, stop and rest for a day. Call your doctor if you are not improving as expected, or if you think you're getting worse instead of better.

Reduce your risk of concussions

- Wear a seat belt every time you drive or ride in a motor vehicle.
- Prevent falls by keeping your home well-lit and floors free of anything that might cause you to trip. Falls around the home are a leading cause of head injury.
- Wear a helmet for any activity that can cause an impact to the head or neck (biking, football, baseball, skateboarding, skiing, snowboarding, horseback riding). Helmets help protect your skull from injury, but brain damage can still occur even if you wear a helmet.
- Exercise regularly to strengthen your leg muscles and improve your balance.

For more information about concussions, visit fallonhealth.org. Under Quick links, click Healthwise® Knowledgebase, and search "concussions".