

QUICK GUIDE

Concussion Basics

A concussion is a type of brain injury and can happen to anyone. Concussions are often described as “mild,” but their affects can still be serious and impact an individual’s life long after the injury. This is why knowing the signs, symptoms and recovery options for a concussion is important for everyone to know.

What are the common signs and symptoms of a concussion?



Cognitive

Difficulty thinking clearly, feeling slowed down, difficulty concentrating, difficulty remembering new information, confusion or feeling in a fog



Physical

Headache, fuzzy/blurry vision, nausea/vomitting (early on), dizziness, sensitivity to light or noise, balance problems, feeling tired or no energy



Sleep

Sleeping more than usual, sleeping less than usual, trouble falling asleep



Emotional

Irritability, sadness, more emotional, nervousness/anxiety, mood swings

WARNING: Don't wait to see a doctor if you see any of the following danger signs:

- Seizures or fixed stares
- Pupils that are different sizes
- Blood or clear liquid from the nose or ears
- Repeated vomiting
- Severe headaches that keep getting worse
- Loss of consciousness
- Increased confusion, agitation, restless
- Weakness or numbness in arms or legs
- Slurred speech

What does recovery from concussion look like?

Most people who have a concussion recover quickly and fully within 14 days, but for some people symptoms can last much longer. After resting during the “acute phase” (24–48 hours after injury), people can gradually increase their physical and mental activity. However, if symptoms reappear or worsen, stop all activity immediately and consult with a doctor.

Recovery may be longer for the elderly (review our *Concussion in the Elderly Quick Guide* for more details), teens, and young children. If you have had a concussion in the past, you are at a higher risk to have another concussion and take longer to recover because the brain is more fragile. Some of the symptoms might show up right away or appear later, especially if you try to return to normal activity too quickly.

General recovery suggestions include:

- **Rest.** It’s ok to sleep. Not sleeping after a concussion or needing to wake up periodically is a myth; rest allows the brain to heal. Slowly and gradually return to normal activity, but if symptoms return or get worse at any point in your recovery, take a break.
- **Limiting screen time.** Too much screen time may increase your symptoms. It’s important to give your brain a rest during recovery.
- **Avoid physically demanding activities.** If you are not back to 100%, you may be at risk for another concussion because your brain is in a more fragile state.
- **Avoid driving, riding a bike or operating equipment.** You may not realize it, but after a concussion your balance and reaction time can be affected.
- **Avoiding alcohol and other drugs.** Substance use will slow your recovery and may put you at risk for further injury.

Adjusting to life after brain injury can be challenging. At the Brain Injury Association of Virginia, our trained experts are available to speak with you about your personal situation and answer your questions. Our services are free and confidential.

To get in touch:

Call **1-800-444-6443**

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