

Taking Care of Yourself

After Your Head's Been Hurt

There are many ways our heads can get hurt. A fall, a car accident, or any sort of blow or jolt to the head can cause a concussion which is a brain injury. Most people who hurt their heads get well and don't experience long term problems. For others, this sort of injury might affect the way they function. The changes might not be noticed for several weeks or months after the injury.

Symptoms

Headaches & Pain

- Headaches that keep coming back
- Head, face or jaw pain
- Unexplained body pain

Balance Problems

- Dizziness
- Tripping or falling often

Sensory Changes

- Bothered by smells, lights or sounds
- Blurry or double vision
- Changes in taste, smell or appetite
- Ringing in ears, hearing loss

Sleep Problems

- Tiredness, change in sleep patterns
- Mixing days and nights up

Personality, Mood & Behavior

- Sad, anxious or restless
- Irritability, mood swings
- Slow to respond
- Taking risks without thinking first
- Starting to use or reacting differently to alcohol or drugs
- Changes in sexual behavior
- Acts differently around others, wants to be alone

Thinking & Communication

- Memory or concentration problems
- Reacting or thinking slowly
- Easily confused or mixed up
- Difficulty understanding what is said or read
- Trouble making decisions
- Trouble planning/starting/finishing a task
- Trouble listening, staying on topic, talking too much

What to do if you experience the symptoms listed and they don't go away:

- Talk with your doctor about a referral to a specialist in brain injury
- Contact the Brain Injury Association of Virginia for more information about brain injury and resources in Virginia at 804-444-6443

Immediate Medical Attention

Go to the Emergency Room or call your doctor if you suddenly experience any of the following:

- Seizures (convulsions) or fixed stares
- Pupils that are different sizes
- Blood or clear liquid from the nose or ears
- Repeated vomiting
- Severe headaches that get worse
- Loss of consciousness
- Sharply increased confusion, agitation, restlessness
- Weakness or numbness in arms or legs
- Slurred speech

Simple steps you can follow to take care of yourself after a concussion*

- Get plenty of sleep at night, and rest during the day
- Avoid physically demanding activities such as working out, sports and heavy housework
- Avoid mentally demanding activities such as video games, prolonged computer use and reading
- Do not use alcohol or recreational drugs

Once your symptoms have reduced significantly, return gradually to your daily activities. This should be done in consultation with your doctor.

If your symptoms come back or you get new symptoms as you become more active, this is a sign that you are pushing yourself too hard. Stop these activities and take more time to rest and recover.

As the days go by, you can expect to gradually feel better.

Only the most common symptoms of a mild brain injury have been listed. Not every problem that could happen is on these lists. Sometimes you might not see these changes in yourself, but they might be noticed by those you are close to such as family, friends or co-workers. It is important to seek help if any of these symptoms are present and do not go away.

**Adapted from Facts About Concussion and Brain Injury, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010.*

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