



**ThinkFirst-SportSmart Concussion Education and Awareness Program**

**SPORT-RELATED CONCUSSION:  
GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS**

**What is a concussion?**

A concussion is a brain injury that cannot be seen on x-rays, CT scans, or MRIs. It affects the way your child may think and remember things, and can cause a variety of symptoms.

**What are the symptoms and signs of concussion?**

*It is important to know that your child does not need to be knocked out (lose consciousness) to have had a concussion. A variety of problems may happen after a concussion, including:*

Thinking Problems	Child's Complaints	Other Problems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Does not know time, date, place, period of game, score of opposing team, score of game</li> <li>▪ General confusion</li> <li>▪ Cannot remember things that happened before and after the injury</li> <li>▪ Knocked out</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Headache</li> <li>▪ Dizziness</li> <li>▪ Feels dazed</li> <li>▪ Feels "dinged" or stunned; "having my bell rung"</li> <li>▪ Sees stars, flashing lights</li> <li>▪ Ringing in the ears</li> <li>▪ Sleepiness</li> <li>▪ Loss of vision</li> <li>▪ Sees double or blurry</li> <li>▪ Stomachache/stomach pain, nausea</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Poor coordination or balance</li> <li>▪ Blank stare/glassy eyed</li> <li>▪ Vomiting</li> <li>▪ Slurred speech</li> <li>▪ Slow to answer questions or follow directions</li> <li>▪ Easily distracted</li> <li>▪ Poor concentration</li> <li>▪ Strange or inappropriate emotions (i.e. laughing, crying, getting mad easily)</li> <li>▪ Not playing as well</li> </ul>

**What causes a concussion?**

Any blow to the head, face or neck, or a blow to the body which causes a sudden jarring of the head may cause a concussion (i.e. a helmet to the head, being knocked to the ground).

**What should you do if your child gets a concussion?**

*Your child should stop playing his/her sport or activity right away. He/she should not be left alone and should be seen by a doctor as soon as possible that day. If your child is knocked out, call an ambulance to take him/her to a hospital immediately. Do not move your child or remove any equipment such as helmets until the paramedics arrive.*

Prepared by the ThinkFirst-SportSmart Concussion Education and Awareness Committee. Last updated, May 2010.



### ***How long will it take for my child to get better?***

The signs and symptoms of concussion (see above) often last for 7-10 days but may last much longer. In some cases, children may take many weeks or months to heal. Having had previous concussions may increase the chance that a child may take longer to heal.

### ***How is a concussion treated?***

*The most important treatment for a concussion is rest.* The child should not exercise, go to school or do any activities that may make him/her worse, like riding a bike, play wrestling with brothers/sisters/friends, video games, reading or working on the computer. If your child goes back to activities before he/she is completely better, he/she is more likely to get worse, and to have symptoms longer. *Even though it is very hard for an active child to rest, this is the most important step.* Once your child is completely better at rest (all symptoms have resolved), he/she can start a step-wise increase in activities (see "**When can my child return to sport?**"). It is important that your child is seen by a doctor before he/she begins the steps needed to return to activity, to make sure he/she is completely better. If possible, your child should be seen by a doctor with experience in treating concussions.

### ***When can my child return to school?***

Sometimes children who have a concussion may find it hard to concentrate in school and may get a worse headache or feel sick to their stomach if they are in school. Children should stay home from school if their symptoms get worse while they are in class. Once they feel better, they can try going back to school part time to start (e.g. for half days initially) and if they are okay with that, then they can go back full time.

### ***When can my child return to sport?***

It is very important that your child not go back to sports if he/she has any concussion symptoms or signs. Return to sport and activity must follow a step-wise approach:

- 1) No activity, complete rest. Once back to normal and cleared by a doctor, go to step 2.
- 2) Light exercise such as walking or stationary cycling, for 10-15 minutes.
- 3) Sport specific activity (i.e. skating in hockey, running in football), for 20-30 minutes. **NO CONTACT.**
- 4) "On field" practice such as ball drills, running routes, and other activities with **NO CONTACT** (i.e. no hitting, no tackling, etc.).
- 5) "On field" practice with body contact, once cleared by a doctor.
- 6) Game play.

**Note:** *Each step must take a minimum of one day.* If your child has any symptoms of a concussion (e.g. headache, feeling sick to his/her stomach) that come back either during activity, or later that day, your child should stop the activity immediately and rest for a minimum of 24 hours. Your child should be seen by a doctor and cleared again before starting the step wise protocol again.

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***When should I take my child to the doctor?***

Every child who gets a head injury should be seen by a doctor as soon as possible. You should take him/her back to the doctor IMMEDIATELY if, after being told your child has a concussion, he/she has worsening of symptoms such as:

1. being more confused
2. headache that is getting worse
3. vomits more than twice
4. doesn't wake up
5. having any trouble walking
6. having a seizure
7. strange behaviour

Problems caused by a head injury can get worse later that day or night. The child should not be left alone and should be checked throughout the night. If you have any concerns about the child's breathing or how he/she is sleeping, wake him/her up. Otherwise, let him/her sleep. If he/she seems to be getting worse, you should see your doctor immediately. **No child should go back to sport until they have been cleared to do so by a doctor.**

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