

# Symptoms of a Concussion



**B**umps and bruises are common when playing sports, but a bad knock on the head could lead to a concussion. Concussions can be difficult to identify, so it's even more crucial to know the signs and symptoms when you are at risk.

## WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

A concussion occurs when your brain bumps against the inside of your skull, causing bleeding and possible tearing in the nerve fibers. The bump could be caused by anything from a hard punch to a sudden stop in traffic. The important thing to note is that a concussion disrupts brain function. The effects depend on how hard the brain hits, but there's usually some change in alertness, balance or speech ability.

## SIGNS OF A CONCUSSION

Every person is different, so there's no way to predict how your body will react to a concussion. Symptoms can be immediate or delayed,

and they can last anywhere from a few minutes to several days or even weeks.

### If you hit your head, be on the lookout for these signs of concussion:

- Confusion
- Dizziness/poor balance
- Nausea/vomiting
- Memory loss
- Headache
- Dilated or uneven pupils
- Slurred speech
- Fatigue
- Ringing in the ears
- Sensitivity to light or sound
- Difficulty sleeping
- Irritability

If these symptoms are prolonged, or if you experience more severe symptoms like vomit-

ing or vision, hearing or balance disturbances, contact your doctor. Delaying medical attention could result in longer-lasting symptoms and an increased risk of developing epilepsy. Avoid taking aspirin, ibuprofen or other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs to treat your symptoms, as they can increase your chance of bleeding.

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## PREVENTING HEAD INJURIES

Concussions can be avoided by wearing proper headgear and practicing safety in sports and activities.

Wear a helmet when biking, horseback riding, skiing or any activity with high risk of head injury.

Tread carefully on slippery surfaces. Walk, never run, around pools and on ice. Stay alert and look out for other skaters when you're at the rink.

Cut clutter to avoid falls in your home. Pick up loose toys and clothes from the floor, and keep stairs and hallways clear. Never play on stairs and take each step at a time.

Buckle up. Prevent whiplash and head injuries by wearing your seatbelt. ■

Information for this Patient Handout comes from the Mayo Clinic: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/concussion/DS00320/DSECTION=symptoms>

*This Patient Handout has been prepared by Cheryl McEvoy, a contributor to ADVANCE.*

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