



Concussion Care

What is a concussion? The CDC defines a concussion as “a type of traumatic brain injury—or TBI—caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or by a hit to the body that causes the head and brain to move rapidly back and forth. This sudden movement can cause the brain to bounce around or twist in the skull, creating chemical changes in the brain and sometimes stretching and damaging brain cells.” Concussions “result in a range of clinical signs and symptoms that may or may NOT involve loss of consciousness.” Concussion symptoms can range from mild to severe and may present very differently with each individual. Common symptoms are: headache, feeling tired or in a fog, trouble with concentration or memory, blurry vision, nausea, dizziness, feeling emotional and changes in sleep patterns among many others.

How is a concussion diagnosed? Currently “there is not perfect diagnostic test or marker that clinicians can rely on for an immediate diagnosis” of a concussion. Thus, concussion diagnosis is made considering several factors: 1) Mechanism of injury, 2) Concussion symptoms reported, 3) Complex physical exam.

What are things to watch out for? The following are Red Flag Symptoms that indicate the individual needs to be evaluated immediately: persistent or projectile vomiting, unequal pupil size, difficulty being aroused, increasing confusion, slurred speech, worsening headache, development of weakness or numbness in the arms or legs, clear or bloody discharge from the ear or nose, seizure activity, and/or loss of consciousness. An individual should be evaluated if symptoms of any kind progressively worsen after the head injury.

How are concussions treated? Concussion management has evolved over the past several years and continues to evolve. Each concussion is different, but we can generally recommend 24-48 hours of rest. After that it may be appropriate to start back to some physical activity, such as light to moderate aerobic activity, as long as symptoms do not increase. This can be discussed further with your provider.

Many different stimuli/activities can increase symptoms so it is important to be mindful and aware of symptoms associated with those stimuli/activity. It is key that each patient limit their activities, be it physical or cognitive, within a window that does not aggravate the concussion symptom. For example, if working on a computer for 20 minutes causes dizziness and a headache then a patient should limit their time on a computer in 10-15-minute increments.

Recovery Time. Unfortunately, we can NOT tell you exactly when you will be “healed”/without symptoms. The average time frame is estimated to be 10-14 days in adults and up to four weeks in kids. Close monitoring of concussions is important and allows us to make changes, recommendations, and/or referrals as needed. Concussion care may require multidisciplinary specialties such as physical therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy or the help of an eye doctor.

