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Your Kids and Concussions

Do you know the signs?

Posted by [Emily Soares Proctor](#), June 28, 2011 at 07:23 PM

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It's a potential injury that terrifies parents and puts helmets on kids for all kinds of activities. But the fact is that your child can fall and sustain a concussion at any time, in any environment. Be ready before it happens by knowing what the signs are for a concussion and what to do about it.

Symptoms to look for

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Mary Thacher, Concussion Coordinator for the Children's Healthcare of Atlanta Concussion Program, says there are some dangerous assumptions about what signs will be present in the case of concussion that may let other symptoms slip by unnoticed:



"A concussion is not a *structural* injury; it is a *functional* injury. This means that you will not see things like unequal pupils or CT scans that show any injury. It is all about the symptoms."

And there are a lot of them: Nausea/vomiting, light sensitivity, loss of vision, loss of hearing, tingling in the hands or mouth, slurred speech, disorientation and memory loss may all occur, even a period after the initial event. Visit the [CDC](#) site for more information.

Post-concussion syndrome

Sometimes a child can have a fall when no one is around and not think to mention it. Or she could hit her head and seem to recover with no ill effects. Post-concussion symptoms can occur days or weeks after the initial injury. If you notice that your child is having headaches, tingling anywhere or having difficulty concentrating, you should consider any recent head jolts. Out-of-character moodiness, loss of concentration and irritability can also be part of post-concussion syndrome, so don't dismiss symptoms that seem emotional rather than physical.

What to do

After your child has a head trauma, keep him quiet and under observation for a half-hour or so, though symptoms could appear much later. If he shows any of the above symptoms and you have witnessed or suspect a head injury, go to the ER right away. There, the doctor may decide to put your child in a neck brace and/or order a CT scan, depending on the symptoms. Your child will be held for observation for several hours or admitted to the hospital if the concussion is a severe one.

Be sure to follow up with your pediatrician a day or two after your hospital visit. Once your child is home, sports, recess and PE will be off-limits for at least one week after your child *stops having symptoms*. So if headaches persist for a week after the incident, you'll start counting seven days from that last day of headaches before your child can resume normal activity. If the symptoms warrant it, additional time out may be required. Remember that with repeated head injuries, the recovery time will continue to get longer.

Your child should also be held out of exams as long as possible, especially those with significant impacts on grades or placement. The brain will need time to get back up to speed as well as heal physically from its bruising; giving your child the necessary time to rest will make all the difference in how he recovers from the injury.

Whether your child is at risk for a concussion (an athlete), has had a severe concussion or has had more than one concussion, talk to your doctor about the [Children's Healthcare of Atlanta Concussion Program](#) or contact them directly. The program is available to kids of all ages, whether the concussion is sports-

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related or due to another kind of accident. They can do valuable evaluations of your child and also establish baseline readings in key areas that can be compared should he get another concussion. The Concussion Program can be reached at 404-785-1111. Additional information is available at <http://www.choa.org/concussion>.

How to make it easier

If your child has a concussion, she will undoubtedly be frustrated by the inability to play and run as usual. The injury can be especially hard in the middle of a sports season. Try distracting your child from what she *can't* do by introducing new activities, such as puzzles and games. Some injuries will also require limited visual stimulation during recovery, so your doctor may recommend limiting television, video games and even reading. It may be tough to think of alternatives, but any kind of play that can keep your young one still for a period will help with recovery and make the time pass quicker for all of you.

Prevention

The fact is that even with the best padded helmet on hand for a potentially head-jolting activity, your child can easily have a fall when there is no reason to expect danger and with nothing between him and a very hard surface. Kids fall in their homes, on playgrounds and anywhere else they can set foot. The best you can do is suit your child up properly for the activities that have a good possibility of causing a head injury (skating, skateboarding, bike/horse riding, football, baseball, hockey, etc.), urge caution the rest of the time, and hope for the best!

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