Concussion and mild brain injury

A concussion is an injury to the brain caused by a sudden movement, jolt or shaking of the head, causing the brain to shake inside the skull. This is often caused by a collision with another person or object. Your child does not need to be “knocked out” (lose consciousness) to have concussion. Most concussion injuries do not involve any loss of consciousness.

If your child receives a bump or blow to the head or body and that causes a jarring of the head or neck, your child should stop activity immediately. It is important to watch out for signs and symptoms of concussion.

What are the signs and symptoms of concussion?

Signs observed by others:
- appearing dazed or stunned
- repeating questions
- problems remembering before or after the injury
- confused about events
- showing personality or behaviour changes

Symptoms reported by the child:
- headache or “pressure” in the head
- dizziness / loss of balance
- nausea / vomiting
- numbness / tingling
- feeling tired (fatigued)/ slowed down
- sensitivity to light / noise
- visual problems (e.g. double vision)
- drowsiness
- trouble sleeping
- does not “feel right”
- feeling more emotional (e.g., sad or nervous)
- trouble thinking clearly, concentrating or remembering

When should I take my child to a doctor?

If your child has any of the signs or symptoms listed, then they should be checked by a doctor. It is important for you to record these symptoms. Note when they occurred, how long they lasted, and how severe they were, so that you can tell the doctor. Signs and symptoms may not show up until 24-48 hours after the head injury.

When should I take my child to the Emergency Department?

Take your child to the nearest Emergency department if at any time your child develops

**HEAD BUMPS**
- H worsening Headache, seizure, unconscious
- E worsening Eye problems (blurred/ double vision)
- A Abnormal behaviour change
- D Dizziness, persistent vomiting (more than twice)
- B Balance problems with weakness or numbness in legs/arms
- U Unsteady on feet, slurred speech
- M Memory impaired, confused, disoriented
- P Poor concentration, drowsy, sleepy
- S Something’s not right (concerned about child)
In an emergency dial 000 for an ambulance.

Treatment
The most important initial treatment for concussion is complete physical and mental rest. Children and adolescents should not exercise, use screens, play video games or study for at least 24-48 hours.

Your child will need some time away from school and sports. A gradual return to school and sporting activities should be planned by your doctor.

Return to school
It is important to let the school know about your child’s concussion. Sometimes children who have had concussion find it hard to concentrate and may have a return or worsening of symptoms, such as headache or nausea. They may also become tired more easily.

Following a concussion your doctor will advise a gradual return to school. Students returning to school may need to:

- have a gradual return to school, starting with fewer hours and building up to a half then full day
- take rest breaks when needed
- be given help and extra time to complete tests/exams or assignments

Exams and assignments
Speak to your child’s school about special provisions, for any tests/exams or assignments. Your child’s doctor may be able to provide documentation to help with their application, including applying for exemptions if necessary. This includes provisions for students sitting their HSC exams.

Return to sport
It is also important to let the sports coach or club know about your child’s concussion. Following a concussion, your child’s balance/coordination, reaction times and thinking may be slower, putting them at risk of further injury. Your doctor will advise a gradual and staged return to activity. Children returning to sport may need to:

- begin with low level intensity physical activity (e.g. 10 minute walk).
- gradually increase non-contact activity, if it is not worsening symptoms
- get medical clearance before returning to regular activity, including contact and collision sports.

Relationships
Recovering from a concussion can be an isolating experience due to withdrawal from school, sport and social activities. Your child may also exhibit changes in temperament, behaviour and increased irritability. It is important for your child to maintain peer relationships even if they are unable to attend school. Your child may also need extra support and it is important to have continued discussions about how they are feeling, as their symptoms may change over time.

Adolescents
In addition to the above, there may be some extra things to consider for adolescents who have had a concussion.

Driving
Young people should not drive for a period of time after they have had concussion due to potential issues with vision, reaction times and decision making. Your child’s doctor will advise when it is safe for them to drive again.

Substance Use
A few of the symptoms following concussion as well as the physical and psychological effects of concussion may be worsened, if your child takes drugs, alcohol or other substances not prescribed by their doctor. Substance use may also impact sleep and prolong recovery time.

Remember
Children and adolescents should be assessed before returning to school, sports or other activities and should not push through, if activities are making their symptoms significantly worse.

If you have any concerns or your child has ongoing symptoms after 3-4 weeks, please contact the Coordinator of the Brain Injury Rehabilitation Program at one of the following hospitals.

They will be able to give you advice and refer your child to your local service.

- Sydney Children’s Hospital Randwick
  02 9382 1590
- The Children’s Hospital at Westmead
  02 9845 2132
- John Hunter Children’s Hospital Newcastle
  02 4925 7963