

INFORMATION/EDUCATION PAGE

Concussion Recognition: A Guide for Parents and Coaches



As parents and coaches, ensuring the safety and well-being of children, adolescents, and young adults engaged in organized or recreational sports athletes is your top priority. This guide will help you to recognize and respond to concussions in youth athletes. The guide is based on the latest 6th International Consensus Statement on Concussion in Sport¹ and the American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine² definition of concussion/mild traumatic brain injury.

What is a concussion?

A concussion is a type of mild traumatic brain injury that occurs when the brain is shaken inside the skull, usually because of a direct blow to the head or body.¹ A concussion can cause lasting problems if not managed properly.^{1,2}

According to the American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine, a concussion can be identified by any of the following:

- Any loss of consciousness (if it happens, it typically lasts <1min and <30min). When someone loses consciousness, they are not aware of or responsive to the environment around them.
- Memory trouble and confusion such as forgetting where they are, being unsure if they are in a practice or a game, or unable to

remember who their coach is (if this happens, it typically lasts <24h).

- Neurologic symptoms such as headaches, dizziness, nausea, feeling or appearing dazed, or sensitive to light or sound.

Key signs and symptoms

Immediately after the injury

- Visible signs: The athlete may seem dazed, confused, or clumsy. You might notice the athlete holding their head, being slow to respond to questions, stumbling, or having trouble balancing.
- Reported symptoms: The athlete may report headaches, dizziness, trouble seeing clearly, or feeling “foggy” or “slow” in their thinking.

Common symptoms in the days after the injury

- Physical: Headache, nausea, vomiting, blurred vision, light or noise sensitivity, and neck pain.
- Cognitive: Slowed thinking, trouble concentrating, or memory loss.
- Emotional: Irritability, sadness, or nervousness.
- Sleep-related: Sleeping more or less than usual, or difficulty falling asleep.

How to recognize a concussion

The Concussion Recognition Tool 6 is designed to help parents and coaches quickly identify concussions.³ It is a simple checklist that guides you

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through what to observe, ask, and do. You can access the Concussion Recognition Tool 6 via this quick response code.



Steps for parents and coaches

1. Observe: During practice and games watch for signs of injury such as loss of balance, confusion, or holding the head after a hit.
2. Ask the athlete: How do you feel? What happened? If they have trouble remembering or have gaps in their memory, it may be a sign of concussion. Ask if they have headaches, dizziness, blurry vision, or balance problems.
3. When to seek urgent medical care: If the athlete shows any of the following signs, seek medical help immediately:
 - Loss of consciousness (even briefly)
 - Repeated vomiting
 - Severe or worsening headache
 - Seizures or convulsions
 - Becoming more lethargic and/or confused
 - Weakness or numbness in limbs
 - Severe neck pain

What to do if you suspect a concussion

The golden rule: "If in doubt, sit them out."

If you suspect a concussion, remove the athlete from play immediately. Continuing to play with a concussion can cause serious complications, including second-impact syndrome. Second-impact syndrome is very rare, but potentially life-threatening swelling of the brain that can occur when a second concussion happens before the brain heals from the first concussion.⁴

Recovery and return to play

1. Rest first: The first 24-48 hours after a concussion should involve relative mental and physical rest. The athlete can walk and do light activities of daily living. They should reduce screen (phone) use, demanding schoolwork, and intense exercise during this time.
2. Slowly resume activity: After the initial relative rest period, light physical activity can be introduced slowly, but only under the supervision of a health care professional—such as primary care physicians, pediatrician, sports medicine specialists, and athletic trainers.
3. Follow medical guidance: Never allows the athlete to return to play until evaluation by a health care professional experienced in concussion management has been completed. Gradual return to full sport participation should follow the health care providers' recommendations. Persistent symptoms lasting over 4 weeks warrant referral to a concussion specialist.

The long-term risks of concussions

Repeated concussions, especially if not treated properly, may lead to long-term thinking or emotional problems. Following the appropriate steps to recognize, manage, and treat concussions can reduce the risk of long-term problems.

Taking action: Being proactive

As a parent or coach, your proactive role in concussion safety is crucial. Here are some ways you can promote safer sports environments:

- Advocate for safety: Encourage your athlete's sports league to follow the most recent concussion evaluation protocols.
- Participate in training: Attend sessions on concussion awareness to stay informed.

Frequently asked questions

Q: Can symptoms appear days later?

A: Yes, concussion symptoms can appear hours or up to 3 days after the injury. Always monitor the athlete for delayed symptoms and consult a health care provider if concerns arise.

Q: Do you need to lose consciousness to have a concussion?

A: No. Loss of consciousness happens only in a small number of concussions. Symptoms of concussion typically develop over hours or days.

Q: How long does recovery usually take?

A: Recovery times vary, but most athletes recover within 2 to 4 weeks, with some athletes needing longer. However, returning to play too

protect our children from the risks associated with head injuries.

For more detailed concussion information, visit the American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine Diagnostic Criteria for mild traumatic brain injury, CDC Concussion Resources, and the 2022 Consensus Statement on Concussion in Sport via the quick response codes below.

[https://www.archives-pmr.org/article/S0003-9993\(23\)00297-6/fulltext](https://www.archives-pmr.org/article/S0003-9993(23)00297-6/fulltext)

<https://www.cdc.gov/heads-up/index.html>

<https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/57/11/695>



early can prolong symptoms or cause further injury. A health care provider can guide and inform you on return to play protocols.

Conclusion: The importance of education

The best way to prevent the long-term effects of concussion is through education, awareness, and prompt action. By following the guidelines in this document, you can help protect young athletes and ensure that concussions are managed properly. This Instructional and Educational Page is part of a larger effort to provide open access educational resources through the American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation so parents, coaches, and professionals stay informed about the latest concussion management practices.

Share and spread awareness

Share this resource with your community to promote safer play for all young athletes. The more we know about concussions, the better we can

Authorship

This page was developed by Ruairi Connolly, MD (*email address:* Ruairi.connolly3@hse.ie); Ann Guernon, BS, MS, PhD; Jaclyn Stephens, BA, MS, PHD; John Leddy, MD; Aoife Murray, MD; Julia Drattell, PhD, ATC; Jacob McPherson, PT, DPT, PhD; Karen McCulloch, PT, PhD, MS; Quratulain Khan, PhD; Akuadasuo Ezenyilimba, PhD; Zainab Al Lawati, MD; Will Panenka, MD, MSc; Samir Belagaje, MD, PhD; Tracey Wallace, MS; Noemi Lansang, MS; and Jennifer Wethe PhD.

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Disclaimer

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