

What is a Concussion?

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Patient Fact Sheet

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A concussion is a mild brain injury that happens when the head and/or neck is hit or moved quickly. A concussion can occur whether a person passes out or not. A concussion can affect physical, emotional, and mental well-being. Brain scans such as MRI or CT scans usually look normal after a concussion because the injury is caused by chemical and energy changes in the brain, not by something you can see on the scan. It is important to follow the advice of doctors and other medical providers to maximize recovery and help the brain heal.

Concussion can cause a variety of symptoms that make day-to-day function difficult. Most people that experience a concussion have full recovery within a few days or weeks. Others have symptoms for a longer period of time. Medical teams including specialized physicians, neuropsychologists, and physical therapists can help manage symptoms and care.

Physical symptoms may include:

- Headache
- Dizziness
- Neck pain
- Imbalance/difficulty walking
- Nausea/vomiting
- Fatigue
- Difficulty sleeping
- Double or blurred vision
- Sensitivity to light and sound

Emotional symptoms may include:

- Irritability
- Restlessness
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Mood swings

Cognitive symptoms may include:

- Short or long term memory loss
- Confusion
- Slowed thinking
- “Fogginess”
- Trouble concentrating
- Short attention span

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What is a Concussion?

What should I do if I have a concussion?

- For 24-48 hours, allow the brain time to heal
 - Limit physical activities, including sports and social activities
 - Limit cognitive demand, including school and work activities
 - Too much activity too soon may cause increased symptoms
- Increase activity as symptoms begin to decrease
- Slowly return to normal activities if there is no significant increase in symptoms

How can physical therapy help if I have a concussion?

- Physical therapy (PT) treatment is different for each person and depends on your symptoms and goals.
- Your PT will perform an evaluation to assess symptoms and how your problems interfere with daily life.
- PTs guide activity and help individuals to safely return to daily life, without the brain becoming over loaded.

How does vestibular rehabilitation relate to concussions?

The vestibular system includes the inner ear, which is very small and fragile. It is located in the skull just behind the ear and sends signals to the brain. This system helps balance and senses head movement. The inner ear also allows your eyes to stay focused while the head is moving. Trauma, like concussions, can cause damage to this system or the connections to the brain.

Symptoms of a damaged vestibular system include dizziness, imbalance, or trouble focusing your eyes while moving. PTs can help by guiding you through exercises that improve dizziness, balance, eye movement control, and confidence in moving around. They also teach strategies to manage dizziness during daily activities. Your PT will give you exercises to do at home, and doing them as directed can help you return to your normal activities more quickly and safely.

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