

Dennis Holderman, MD

Concussions – Signs and Symptoms

When someone hits something very hard or has a blow to the head, the brain suddenly shifts and can knock against the skull's bony surface causing a concussion.

A concussion is a temporary change in the way the brain works when it is suddenly moved or jarred in this way. Although many think of a concussion as someone losing consciousness (passing out), a person can have a concussion and never lose consciousness.

All concussions can be serious, no matter if one is unconscious, or for how long one is unconscious. Most of the time, after a mild head injury, people return to normal even if the injury caused a concussion. However, the more concussions one gets the more serious problems that can occur.

According to Dennis Holderman, MD, "Motor vehicle accidents are cited as the most common cause of head injury. [However,] the majority of the concussions that I see are a result of a sports injury."

When someone gets a concussion the victim may act differently depending on how forcefully the brain was jarred inside the head. The majority of people that experience a concussion will feel either groggy or dazed for a period of time. Sometimes one can feel nauseated or even throw up right after a concussion. Many people will have some sort of mild to severe headache that lasts for at least a few days.

Sometimes, with a severe concussion, there may be bleeding inside the head or bruising of the delicate brain. Usually those who experience such a severe concussion will be knocked out for longer than a few minutes and will act very confused or vomit repeatedly.

One who is knocked unconscious should get immediate care in the emergency department. If a concussion is suspected, the physician will perform a complete examination. During the examination, questions that seem "normal" such as, "What is your name?" may be asked—but these questions are important because they check someone's memory and ability to concentrate. Also, the physician will examine a patient by looking into the eyes and checking reflexes and balance. In severe cases, a computed tomography (CAT) scan is occasionally ordered to make sure there is no bleeding or bruising inside someone's head after a concussion, especially if the person lost consciousness or is feeling very sick in the emergency room (ER).

Holderman gives his patients the advice "to closely monitor their symptoms." "Patients should avoid strenuous physical activity until all of their symptoms have cleared, and should see their family physician if they worsen or do not clear up by two weeks after the injury. Also, to avoid a concussion he says, "patients should always wear helmets while bicycling or skateboarding, wear seatbelts while in a car, and use proper technique and protective equipment while participating in contact sports," said Holderman.

Fact Sheet

Possible Causes of a Concussion:

- Sports injury—high contact sports such as football, boxing and hockey pose a higher risk of head injury, even with the use of protective headgear
- Falls
- Car accidents
- Bike and blading accidents
- Physical violence (i.e. fighting)

Symptoms of a Concussion May Include:

- “Seeing stars” and feeling dazed, dizzy or lightheaded
- Memory loss, such as trouble remembering things that happened right before and after the injury
- Nausea or vomiting
- Headaches
- Slurred speech or saying things that do not make sense
- Blurred vision and sensitivity to light
- Difficulty concentrating, thinking or making decisions
- Difficulty with coordination or balance
- Feeling anxious or irritable for no apparent reason
- Feeling overly tired

Grades of a Concussion:

- Grade One: Can have some of the symptoms listed above, but with no loss of consciousness and with symptoms ending within 15 minutes
 - A player can resume play once symptoms have stopped. However, the player should stop play if they get another head injury.
- Grade Two: There has not been loss of consciousness but the symptoms last longer than 15 minutes
 - A player should stop playing and not return to any type of sport or physical activity that could cause a head injury for at least another week.
- Grade Three: The person loses consciousness—even if it is just for a few seconds
 - This person should see a doctor as quickly as possible.

If you would like to make an appointment with Dr. Holderman, please contact Highland Family Medicine at 937.840.9150.

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