

Concussion Guide for Youth and High School Coaches



THE FACTS

- All concussions are serious.
- Most concussions occur *without* loss of consciousness.
- Recognition and proper response to concussions when they first occur can help aid recovery and prevent further injury, or even death.

A bump, blow, or jolt to the head can cause a concussion, a type of traumatic brain injury (TBI). Concussions can also occur from a blow to the body that causes the head and brain to move rapidly back and forth. Even a “ding,” “getting your bell rung,” or what seems to be mild bump or blow to the head can be serious.

RECOGNIZING A POSSIBLE CONCUSSION

To help recognize a concussion, watch for or ask others to report the following two things among your athletes:

1. A forceful bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body that results in rapid movement of the head.
– and –
2. Any change in the athlete’s behavior, thinking, or physical functioning, or any other signs or symptoms of concussion. (See the Signs and Symptoms at right.)

SIGNS OBSERVED BY COACHING STAFF

- Appears dazed or stunned (such as glassy eyes)
- Is confused about assignment or position
- Forgets an instruction or play
- Is unsure of score or opponent
- Moves clumsily or poor balance
- Answers questions slowly
- Loses consciousness (even briefly)
- Shows mood, behavior, or personality changes
- Can’t recall events prior to hit or fall
- Can’t recall events after hit or fall

SYMPTOMS REPORTED BY ATHLETE

- Headache or “pressure” in head
- Nausea or vomiting
- Balance problems or dizziness
- Double or blurry vision
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy
- Concentration or memory problems
- Confusion
- Feeling more emotional, nervous, or anxious
- Does not “feel right” or is “feeling down”



Remember, you can't see a concussion and some athletes may not experience and/or report symptoms until hours or days after the injury. Do not try to judge the severity of the injury yourself. A seemingly "mild" symptom following bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body can be serious. When in doubt, sit them out.

Most athletes with a concussion will recover quickly and fully. But for some athletes, signs and symptoms of concussion can last for days, weeks, or longer. Exercising or activities that involve a lot of concentration, such as studying, working on the computer, or playing video games may cause concussion symptoms (such as headache or tiredness) to reappear or get worse. After a concussion, physical and cognitive activities—such as thinking and learning—should be carefully managed and monitored by a health care professional.

It is normal for athletes to feel frustrated, sad, and even angry because they cannot return to sports right away or cannot keep up with their school work. Talk with the athletes about these issues and offer support and encouragement.

PREVENTION AND PREPARATION

As a coach, you play a key role in preventing concussions and responding properly when they occur. Here are some steps you can take:

Check with your league or school about concussion policies. Concussion policy statements can be developed to include the league or school's commitment to safety, a brief description about concussion, and information on when athletes can safely return to play. Parents and athletes should sign the concussion policy statement before the first practice.

Learn about concussion. Review the signs and symptoms of concussion and keep the four-step action plan (shown below) with you at games and practices.

Educate athletes, parents, and other coaches about concussion. Before the first practice, talk to athletes and parents, and other coaches and school officials about the dangers of concussion and potential long-term consequences of concussion. Explain your concerns about concussion and your expectations of safe play.

- Show the videos, available online at: www.cdc.gov/Concussion.
- Hand out the concussion fact sheets for athletes and for parents at the beginning of the season and again if a concussion occurs.
- Remind athletes to tell coaching staff right away if they suspect they have a concussion or that a teammate has a concussion.

Insist that safety comes first. No one technique or safety equipment is 100 percent effective in preventing concussion, but there are things you can do to help minimize the risks for concussion and other injuries.

For example, to help prevent injuries:

- Practice safe playing techniques and encourage athletes to follow the rules of play.
- Make sure players wear approved and properly-fitted protective equipment. Protective equipment should be well-maintained and be worn consistently and correctly.

Prevent long-term problems. If one of your athletes has a concussion, their brain needs time to heal. Keep the athlete out of play the day of the injury and until an appropriate health care professional says they are symptom-free and it's OK to return to play. A repeat concussion that occurs before the brain recovers from the first—usually within a short time period (hours, days, weeks)—can be very dangerous and may slow recovery, or increase the chances for long-term problems. Recognition and proper response to concussions when they first occur can help prevent further injury or even death.

Teach your athletes it's not smart to play with a concussion. Rest is essential after a concussion. Sometimes athletes, parents, and others wrongly believe that it shows strength and courage to play injured. Discourage others from pressuring injured athletes to play. Some athletes may also try to hide their symptoms. Don't let your athlete convince you that they're "just fine" or that they can "tough it out." Emphasize to athletes and parents that playing with a concussion is dangerous.



WHEN A CONCUSSION IS SUSPECTED

If you suspect that an athlete has a concussion, implement your 4-step action plan:

1. **Remove the athlete from play.** Look for signs and symptoms of a concussion if your athlete has experienced a bump or blow to the head or body. When in doubt, sit them out.
2. **Ensure that the athlete is evaluated by a health care professional experienced in evaluating for concussion.** Do not try to judge the severity of the injury yourself. Health care professionals have a number of methods that they can use to assess the severity of concussions. As a coach, recording the following information can help health care professionals in assessing the athlete after the injury:
 - Cause of the injury and force of the hit or blow to the head or body
 - Any loss of consciousness (passed out/knocked out) and if so, for how long
 - Any memory loss immediately following the injury
 - Any seizures immediately following the injury
 - Number of previous concussions (if any)
3. **Inform the athlete's parents or guardians about the possible concussion and give them information on concussion.** Make sure they know that the athlete should be seen by a health care professional experienced in evaluating for concussion.
4. **Keep the athlete out of play the day of the injury and until an appropriate health care professional says they are symptom-free and it's OK to return to play.**

WHEN IN DOUBT, SIT THEM OUT

If you think your athlete has sustained a concussion: TAKE HIM/HER OUT OF PLAY, and seek the advice of a health care professional experienced in evaluating for concussion.



www.cdc.gov/Concussion