

# Concussion safety

A parent's guide to signs, symptoms, treatment, and prevention.



**A concussion is a brain injury that disrupts normal brain function, and is usually caused by a sudden jolt or blow to the head or body. An athlete does not have to be knocked out or have memory loss to have suffered a concussion. In fact, most athletes who suffer a sports-related concussion do not lose consciousness.**

## Signs and symptoms

Although you can't see a concussion, an athlete with any change in behavior, thinking, or physical functioning after a blow to the head or body should be suspected of having a concussion.

## You may notice that the athlete:

- Appears dazed or stunned
- Forgets plays
- Is unsure of game, score, or opponent
- Exhibits unsteadiness
- Moves clumsily
- Answers questions slowly
- Loses consciousness
- Can't recall events either before or after the injury
- Is more sleepy or tired than usual
- Seems sad, nervous, or anxious
- Is irritable, easily frustrated, or upset
- Has problems with school performance

## The athlete may complain of:

- Headache
- Concentration or memory problems
- Nausea
- Balance problems or dizziness
- Double or blurred vision
- Feelings of being "in a fog" or slowed down
- Sensitivity to light or noise

## First aid

If the athlete is knocked out, or if there is concern for a neck or spine injury, do not move them. Keep the athlete still until medical help arrives. Any athlete who shows signs or symptoms of a concussion should be removed from play immediately.

The athlete should not be allowed to return to activity until evaluated by a healthcare professional with experience and training in diagnosis and management of concussions. Do not leave an athlete alone for several hours after a concussion, and watch for any changes or worsening symptoms.

## Other symptoms

Any of the following conditions indicate a need for immediate medical attention (as they may be signs of a medical problem other than concussion):

- A headache that becomes more severe or doesn't improve with acetaminophen (Tylenol®)
- Increasing confusion
- Extreme sleepiness or trouble waking up
- Vomiting (more than once)
- Seizures (convulsions – arms and legs jerk uncontrollably)
- Trouble walking or talking
- Weak or numb arms or legs
- Any other sudden change in thinking or behavior



### Treatment

- The primary treatment for concussion is physical and mental rest.
- In the first few days, allow plenty of down-time and have the athlete avoid activities such as sports, PE, driving, video games, and studying.
- Doing too much too soon may worsen symptoms and prolong recovery.
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) may be given for headaches, but no other medications should be given without a doctor's approval.

### SSM Health Cardinal Glennon SportsCare

SSM Health Cardinal Glennon SportsCare is the premier pediatric sports medicine provider in St. Louis and St. Charles. We provide exclusive, direct access to comprehensive medical care for young athletes.

Specialists your child has access to include adolescent medicine physicians, cardiologists, emergency medicine physicians, neurologists, nutritionists, orthopedists, pediatric psychologists, physical therapists, pulmonologists, radiologists, and rehabilitation specialists. We also keep kids in the game through educational programs and supports for parents, coaches and athletes that focus on injury prevention, proper technique and overall athletic health.

For more information about SSM Health Cardinal Glennon SportsCare or to find a specialist for your athlete, call or text us **24/7 at 314-577-5640**.

Expert care for young athletes by SSM Health Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital providers, **24 hours a day in the ER at:** SSM Health Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital, DePaul Hospital, St. Clare Hospital, St. Joseph Hospital-St. Charles, St. Joseph Hospital-Lake St. Louis, Anderson Hospital, and HSHS St. Elizabeth Hospital.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, SSM Health ministries implemented enhanced safety measures, which are evaluated periodically based on COVID-19 transmission numbers. To ensure your protection and that of others, we continue to require face masks upon entry along with ministry-specific screening processes.

### Concussion prevention

Although it is not yet known why some athletes are more likely to get a concussion than others, there are some ways to lessen the risk:

- Make sure athletes follow the rules of the sport – most rule-changes are intended to protect athletes from injury.
- Provide proper supervision and officiating during practices and games.
- Discourage aggressive and unsportsmanlike play.
- Insist that athletes wear helmets during all practices and games for sports that require helmets.
- Require helmets to be worn during other sports-related activities, such as riding a bike or skateboard, roller skating, snow skiing, and snowboarding.

NOTE: Properly worn mouth guards may prevent injuries to the mouth and teeth, but may not prevent a concussion.

### Recovery

Most athletes with a concussion will recover completely within a few weeks of the initial injury.

### Return to play

Before returning to sports, an athlete who has suffered a concussion should be evaluated by a health care professional with experience in managing concussions. Returning to play before complete recovery puts the athlete at risk for a more serious injury. Once an athlete has no symptoms while resting or during everyday activities, they may begin a stepwise return-to-play protocol under the guidance of a health care professional.