

Concussion

What is a concussion?

A concussion is considered a type of brain injury. Though often associated with playing sports, concussions may also be caused by car accidents, having fallen and hit your head, or having received blows to the head in some way. Essentially, it can occur anytime the head and brain are forced to move rapidly back and forth. This type of motion may push the brain up against the walls of the skull, resulting in a number of physical and cognitive symptoms. It may potentially lead to bleeding in or around the brain, which can be fatal. Cases can range from mild to severe and it is possible for a person to have a concussion without realizing it. Most people make a full recovery from a concussion.

What are the symptoms associated with a concussion?

Symptoms may not be immediate and can appear in the following days or weeks after the incident that caused the injury. Headaches, neck pain, (temporary) loss of consciousness, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, appearing dazed, and fatigue are all common symptoms. Delayed symptoms may include irritability, mood changes, sensitivity to light and sound, difficulty sleeping, changes to taste and smell, and difficulty with memory and concentration.

When do I need to seek medical attention? How do I treat a concussion?

For injuries where a concussion is suspected, being examined and diagnosed by a health care provider is advised. Rest is often the most critical step in recuperating from a concussion. Limiting physical exertion and tasks that require concentration, such as reading, school work, using the computer, playing video games, or watching television, may be advised in order to limit the risk of making symptoms worse. Over-the-counter pain relievers such as acetaminophen (brand name: Tylenol) may be used to provide some relief for headaches (the use of aspirin and ibuprofen for pain relief is not advised, due to an increased risk of bleeding). A health care provider can advise when it is safe to resume activities, both cognitive and physical, as symptoms improve over time.

However, it is key to pay attention to any symptoms that worsen over time in those suspected of having a concussion. This may include frequent vomiting, worsening headache, any loss of consciousness that lasts more than 30 seconds, changes in speech, physical coordination, irritability, and appearing confused, seizures, vision issues, persistent or reoccurring dizziness, and large bumps or bruises. If a person is experiencing these types of symptoms, seeking immediate medical help is advised. This can be done by contacting the Columbia University Emergency Medical Service (CUEMS) for those on or near Columbia's Morningside campus or by going directly to the nearest hospital's emergency department.

How can I prevent a concussion?

Taking regular precautions with day-to-day activities may help reduce the likelihood of concussions:

- Wear appropriate and well-fitted protective gear when playing sports or engaging in activities that could result in head injury (skating, bicycling, etc.). This is particularly critical for those participating in contact sports. However, it is still possible to get a concussion while wearing a helmet.
- Be physically active regularly — doing so will strengthen muscles and improve balance which may help to avoid falls.
- Wear a seat belt to reduce the risk of injury in the event of a traffic accident.

Online & Off-Campus Resources

Go Ask Alice!: goaskalice.columbia.edu

Mount Sinai St. Luke's Hospital Emergency Department
(111th Street & Amsterdam Ave)

GH: Last Reviewed/Updated [January 9, 2018]

Columbia Health

On-Campus Resources

Medical Services: 212-854-7426

health.columbia.edu/medical-services

Columbia University Emergency Medical Service
(CUEMS): 212-854-5555

www.health.columbia.edu

212-854-2284