

Information about Mild Head Injury or Concussion ©



This booklet is dedicated to the late Dorothy Gronwell O.B.E.

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Contributors:

Professor Jennie Ponsford*

Ms Catherine Willmott

Ms Robyn Nelms

Ms Carolyn Curran

Monash-Epworth Rehabilitation Research Centre, Epworth Hospital &

*Monash University and National Trauma Research Institute

Professor Peter Cameron

Department of Epidemiology & Preventive Medicine, Monash University,

Emergency and Trauma Centre, Alfred Hospital and National Trauma

Research Institute

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Information about Mild Head Injury or Concussion

You were knocked out in an accident, and brought into the Accident and Emergency Department of the hospital or to the doctor's surgery. Another name for being knocked out is concussion, or mild head injury. We would like to help you understand what happens when you are knocked out and what to expect while you are getting over it. In this leaflet you will also find advice about what to do and what not to do until you are better.

Concussion, or mild head injury is the result of a bang on the head which either makes you lose consciousness, or makes you giddy. It usually takes a little while for the brain to recover from concussion. Until it has recovered your brain has less energy to work on than normal.

Even remembering things that happen can be difficult. In hospital you were probably asked what you remembered before and after the accident. This is because everyone who has been concussed has a memory gap. The gap stretches from a short while before you were knocked out, to some time afterwards. You will probably never be able to remember this time.

You may experience some unpleasant effects in the days or weeks after your injury. These are likely to be temporary.

What are the common symptoms?

Common symptoms following a mild head injury include headaches, dizziness, fatigue, being a little slower to think and difficulties with concentration and memory. Studies have shown that these symptoms generally only last a few days and then improve. There is not necessarily any need for further treatment.

What can I expect?

Studies have also shown that giving people information about the nature of mild head injuries and providing some strategies to deal with symptoms can be helpful in reducing problems over the long term. Some of the strategies are listed in this brochure.

Having other stressful things in your life, leading a busy life, working in a demanding job or returning to study can also make it more difficult to cope with a mild head injury. You may need to take things easier and allow your brain time to recover before returning to all your activities.

The signs of a mild head injury are usually not visible and so it can sometimes be difficult for other people to understand what you are experiencing. You may need to explain this to your employer, teachers, family and friends.

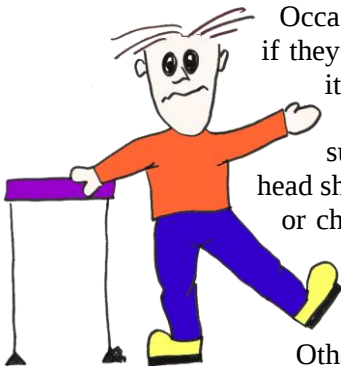
Headaches

Headaches are a common problem after being knocked out. They can be made worse by fatigue and stress. Sleeping, resting or taking a break from activities requiring concentration or effort will usually relieve headaches. If your headache gets worse, or cannot be relieved, see your doctor.



Dizziness

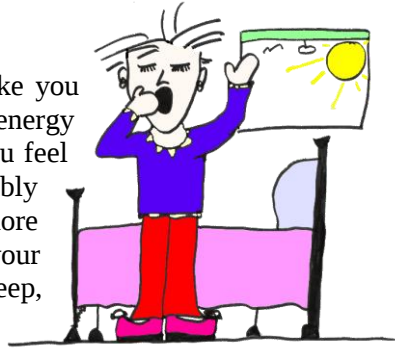
Occasionally, people find that they get a giddy feeling if they move or change their position quickly. Usually it is only a problem for a few days. If you find that things seem to spin round if you sit up suddenly after lying down, or if you turn your head sharply, it is best to avoid such sudden movements, or changes in position until it clears. If the dizziness persists for more than a week or two, see your doctor.



Other symptoms may include sensitivity to light, hustle and bustle, difficulty sleeping and ringing in the ears.

Tiredness

At first, even a little effort may make you feel very tired. Your brain has less energy to spare than it normally does. If you feel sleepy, go to bed. You will probably find that you need several hours more sleep than you usually do. Let your brain tell you when it needs to sleep, even if it is the middle of the day.



Concentration Problems

No one can concentrate well when they are tired, so it is not surprising that many people have trouble concentrating for a while after they have been knocked out. Maybe you cannot even concentrate well enough to read the newspaper. If you really need to, just read for a short time, then come back to it when you have had a break. The same thing applies to other areas where concentration is needed. Leave things that need your complete concentration until you are feeling better. If you need to concentrate on something important, do it when you are feeling fresh.



Forgetting Things

You cannot expect your brain to be as good at remembering things as it usually is. Don't worry if you can't think of a name or a phone number that you ought to know, or if you go to get something, and then can't remember what it is. Your memory is only going to be a problem until you recover. In the meantime, get your family and friends to remind you of important dates and appointments, or write things down.



Clumsiness

You may find that you are a bit more clumsy than usual. Don't worry if you do find that you are a bit unsteady on your feet, or bump into furniture, or maybe drop things. Just take everything you do a little more slowly. Your brain is the control centre for your whole body. It has to make sense out of all the messages coming in from your eyes and ears and other senses, and to send the right signals to the right muscles for you to be able to do anything. So give yourself more time to do things



Slowness

Some people who have experienced a mild head injury may find their thinking is a bit slower. This means they might have some difficulty keeping up with conversations or following directions, and things take longer to get done. Encourage others to slow down by asking questions and having them repeat what they have said. Allow yourself extra time to complete tasks and avoid situations where you are under pressure to do things quickly.

Irritability

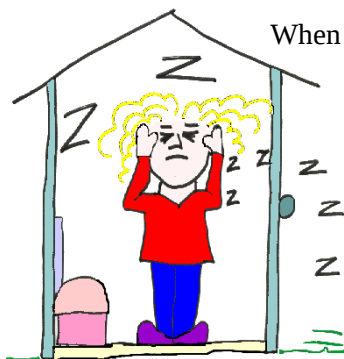


Some people who have been concussed find that they get annoyed easily by things that normally would not upset them. This does not last very long, but it can be difficult for you and for your family. It happens because the brain controls your emotional system as well as the rest of your body.

After concussion your emotions may not be as well controlled as they usually are.

There are several ways to deal with this. Some people find that going out of a room, or away from a situation as soon as it begins to get annoying is enough. Others use relaxation techniques to help them get back on an even keel. You may find that you can stop the irritability developing by using up energy with something like hitting a punch-bag, or riding an exercise bicycle, or skipping hard for a while, if tiredness permits. Irritability will be worse when you are tired, so rest will also help.

Noise Problems



When you want to shut out something you don't want to look at, all you have to do is close your eyes. It is much harder to shut your ears. When your brain is fully awake it uses part of its energy to damp down noises that would interfere with what you are doing. After concussion your brain may not

have enough energy to spare to do this, and you may find that most noises bother you. Explain to your family and friends, and ask them to keep the noise level down if they can. If you have a very young family who could not be expected to understand, it may be more comfortable for everyone if they can have a few days' holiday away with, perhaps, obliging grandparents.

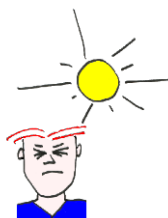
Eye Problems

If these occur you may either have difficulty focusing, so that things look blurred or double, or you may find that your eyes are sensitive to bright light. Double vision, and needing to wear dark glasses in strong



light, should both clear up within a few

days. If you wear glasses, do not go back to your optician to have them changed until you have fully recovered from your concussion. It probably is not that your sight has changed, but that your brain is not putting together the messages from each eye as well as it normally does.



What NOT to do:



Do not stay in bed until you are better. You do need sleep at this stage, but you also need to give your brain enough to do to help it to recover.

Do not drink alcohol. Do not expect your brain to deal with alcohol in the normal way. The effect of alcohol is very similar to the effect of concussion, and after concussion alcohol is more likely to knock you out again.



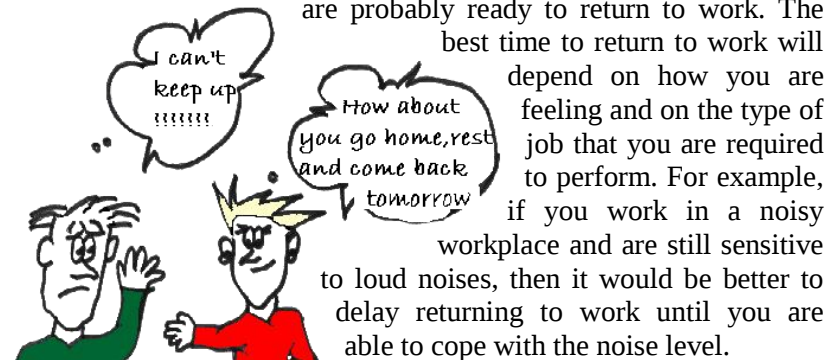
Do not drive your car or ride your motorbike until you have made sure that your concentration is good, that you can react quickly enough to handle unexpected traffic hazards, and that your ability to judge distances is back to normal.

Do not play sport. Do not put yourself in a position where you are likely to get another bang on the head. Avoid activities such as football and skateboarding where you might get knocked out again, at least until you have recovered from this accident. Some sporting clubs have specific guidelines, so you may need to check with your club for advice. If riding your bicycle make sure you wear an approved helmet.



Getting Back to Work

Generally, if you are not experiencing persistent headaches, have no double vision and are not experiencing ongoing dizziness, then you are probably ready to return to work. The



best time to return to work will depend on how you are feeling and on the type of job that you are required to perform. For example, if you work in a noisy workplace and are still sensitive to loud noises, then it would be better to delay returning to work until you are able to cope with the noise level.

Level of fatigue or tiredness will also be important in how you perform at work. If you are required to operate machinery then you need to be alert. When first returning to work it may be necessary to take extra breaks or to return on a part-time basis for a few days. Similarly, if you are in a busy office environment you may find that you fatigue quickly and need to take extra breaks. Remember that tiredness can affect your level of concentration, and you will not work as efficiently if you are not concentrating well. You may need to talk to your employer about the most suitable arrangements for returning to work.

Getting back to school

If you go to school or university, you may also need some time off. When you return, you will need to take things a little easy at first. You may experience some of the problems that are outlined above. For example, you may find that it is harder to concentrate on lessons in class. It's also possible that you may not be able to do things as quickly as you are used to doing them, or that you forget details. You may find that a noisy classroom makes you irritable, or that you get very tired. It is important to let your lecturers and teachers know that you have been concussed. It may be helpful to provide them with some information which will give them a better understanding of the difficulties you might be experiencing.



Some useful strategies

- * take a little extra time to complete work
- * take frequent breaks
- * make extra notes
- * delay examinations

Further Advice or Assistance

If your symptoms continue and/or if you find you are anxious, or "stressed out", you may need more support.

The first step is to see your local doctor. In some cases it may be helpful to get a referral to see a rehabilitation specialist at an agency that specialises in head injury. Sometimes an assessment with a neuropsychologist or a vocational occupational therapist may need to be arranged.

