

Information about Concussion[©]



This booklet has been produced following a research study into mild head injury, funded by the Victorian Ministerial Implementation Committee on Head Injury.

Contributors:

Associate Professor Jennie Ponsford*

Ms Catherine Willmott

Ms Robyn Nelms

Ms Carolyn Curran

Bethesda Rehabilitation Centre, Epworth Hospital & *Monash University

Roslyn Barnard, North Coast Head Injury Service

Associate Professor Peter Cameron Department of Emergency Medicine,
Alfred Hospital

Thanks to Rachel Nelms for the illustrations.

The booklet was adapted from one written by Dr Dorothy Gronwall & Dr Phillip Wrightson Auckland Hospital, New Zealand. Their assistance is gratefully acknowledged. The authors also wish to acknowledge the generous support of the Jack Brockhoff Foundation in providing funds for the production of this booklet.

© This booklet should not be reproduced or used for any other purpose without permission.

The Oklahoma State Department of Health would like to thank the contributors for their permission to use this booklet.

Information about Mild Head Injury or Concussion

You have experienced a blow to the head which has caused you to be knocked out or confused. Another name for being knocked out is **concussion** or **mild traumatic brain injury**. We would like to help you understand what happens when you have a mild traumatic brain injury 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 traumatic brain injury is the result of a blow to the head that makes you lose consciousness or makes you confused. It usually takes a little while for the brain to recover from a concussion. Until it has recovered, your brain has less energy to work on than normal.

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

After your injury it is wise to be alert for signs that you are not recovering well and to seek medical advice concerning this. On the back page of this booklet we give the signs to look out for.

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

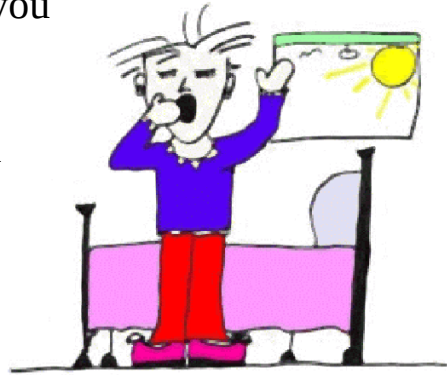
Occasionally, people find that they get a light-headed feeling if they move or change their position quickly. Usually, it is only a problem for a few days. If you find that things seem to spin round if you sit up suddenly after lying down, or if you turn your head sharply, it is best to avoid such sudden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



Other symptoms may include sensitivity to light and/or activity, difficulty sleeping, or 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. You may also have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. 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 had a blow to the head. 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 rested.

Forgetting Things

During recovery, 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, write things down or use electronic tools like email and cell phones to remind you.



Clumsiness



You may find that you are a bit more clumsy than usual. Don't worry if you 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 center 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 had a blow to the head 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 had a blow to the head 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 feel better. You may find that you can stop the irritability developing by using up energy with something like a brisk walk or riding an exercise bicycle 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 shut out noises that would interfere with what you are

doing. After a 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' away with, perhaps, obliging grandparents.

Eye Problems

If these occur, there may be either trouble 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

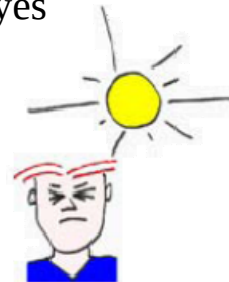
glasses, do not go back to your vision

specialist to have them changed until

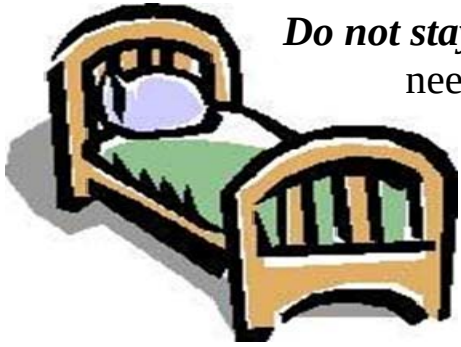
you have fully recovered from

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 some activity to help it to recover.

Do not drink alcohol or use drugs. Do not expect your brain to

deal with alcohol and drugs in the normal way. The effect of alcohol is very similar to the effect of concussion, and after a concussion drink is more likely to set your recovery back.



Do not drive your car or ride your motorcycle 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. This includes ATVs, scooters and bicycles.

Do not play sports. Do not put yourself in a position where you are likely to get another blow to the head. Avoid activities where you might hit your head again until you have recovered from this accident.

Limit television, computer use, hand-held games and cell phone texting because these activities can make you more tired and increase the time it takes for your brain to heal.



Getting Back to Work



Check with your health care provider before returning 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.

Level of fatigue or tiredness will also be important in how you perform at work. 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.

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 and your health care provider about the most suitable arrangements for returning to work.

Getting Back To School

If you are a student, 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 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 instructors know that you have had a concussion. 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

- Contact the Office of Students with Disabilities for accommodations while recovering
- Check with your health care provider
- Take extra time to complete work
- Take frequent breaks
- Record lectures

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 health care provider. In some cases it may be helpful to get a referral to see a specialist in head injury. Sometimes an assessment with a neuropsychologist or other health care specialist may need to be arranged.



Go to the Emergency Department *immediately* if the person:

- Becomes **unconscious** or unable to wake up
- Becomes **confused** (they don't make sense)
- Has **uncontrollable movement** of the face or limbs
- **Vomits repeatedly**
- Has **persistent** headaches
- Has **severe dizziness**

Additional Resources

- **Brain Injury Association of Oklahoma**
(800) 444-6443
www.braininjuryoklahoma.org
Provides information, education and support to assist Oklahomans and their families currently living with traumatic brain injury.
- **Progressive Independence Inc – Center for Independent Living**
(800) 801-3203
www.progind.org
Provides information on consumer choice in all aspects of independent living by offering information and referral, individual and systems advocacy, peer counseling, medical equipment loans, and skills training.
- **OASIS**
(Oklahoma Area-wide Services Information System)
(800) 426-2747
<http://oasis.ouhsc.edu>
Provides information, referral and assistance to Oklahomans with disabilities and special health care needs.
- **Office of Disability Concerns**
(405) 521-3756 or (800) 522-8224
www.ok.gov/odc/index.html
Provides information and referral on specific disabilities, housing, financial assistance, transportation, civil rights and other disability related subjects.
- **Traumatic Brain Injury Project**
Oklahoma State Department of Health
(405) 271-3430 or (800) 522-0204
<http://ips.health.ok.gov>
Provides a Traumatic Brain Injury Service Directory with a list of traumatic brain injury services and resources.

