

Don't Let It Go To Your Head!

By Deborah Holmes, PT

There are over two million sports and recreation concussive injuries annually in the United States. This is likely a huge underestimation! What is a concussion? This is a brain injury that is caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body. It can change the way your brain normally works and can occur during practices or games in any sport or recreational activity. You don't have to be 'knocked out' and it can be serious even if you have a dazed or stunned feeling. In fact few may have loss of consciousness.

All concussions are serious. A concussion can affect your ability to do schoolwork and other activities (such as playing video games, working on a computer, studying, driving, or exercising). Most people with a concussion get better, but it is important to give your brain time to heal.

You can't see a concussion, but you or your coach might notice one or more of the symptoms listed below right away or a few days later.

Signs that can be observed by staff:

- Appears to be dazed or stunned
- Is confused about assignment
- Forgets plays
- Is unsure of game, score, or opponent
- Moves clumsily
- Answers questions slowly
- Loses consciousness\Shows behavior or personality change
- Forgets events before play
- Forgets events after hit

Signs that can be observed by athlete:

- Headache
- Nausea
- Balance problems or dizziness
- Double or blurry vision
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Feeling sluggish or slowed down
- Feeling 'foggy' or groggy
- Concentration or memory problems
- Change in sleep patterns.

What should you do if you think you have a concussion?

Never ignore a bump or blow to the head even if you feel fine. Tell your coach and parents right away if you think you have a concussion or if one of your teammates might have a concussion. The International Conference on Concussion in Sports recommends that when a player shows any signs or symptoms of a concussion, they should not be allowed to return to play in the current game or practice. There should be regular monitoring and the player should be medically evaluated. Furthermore, the player must demonstrate they are symptom free at rest, be symptom free with physical and cognitive exertion and have intact neurocognitive functioning. Most athletes recover spontaneously within three weeks of trauma.

How can a concussion be prevented?

Every sport is different, but there are steps you can take to protect yourself. Use the proper sports equipment, including personal protective equipment. In order for equipment to protect you, it must be the right equipment for the game, position, or activity. It must be worn correctly and be the correct size and fit. The equipment should also be worn every time you play or practice. Some athletes attend physical therapy for monitoring of symptoms and for progressive therapeutic exercises and activities while they are healing. Remember, it is better to miss a game or two than to sit out the whole season.