**Rethinking Concussions**

Most of us probably have either suffered a concussion or know someone who has. And, while it may not sound like a serious condition, it is. A concussion is a mild traumatic brain injury that affects how your brain functions.

Most concussions are caused by a blow to the head, with falls being the most common source of injury. You also can get a concussion if your head is violently shaken, as might occur in a car accident.

Soldiers in combat are prone to concussions caused by blast waves that occur during bombing or shelling. Concussions also are common among athletes who play contact sports, such as football or soccer.
What Happens When You Get a Concussion?

Your brain is soft and surrounded by spinal fluid within your skull. When you suffer a concussion from any cause, your brain gets jolted within your skull. This can cause bruising, nerve injury, and damage to blood vessels within the brain.

Concussions are categorized as mild (grade 1), moderate (grade 2) or serious (grade 3), and symptoms can vary depending on the severity. Headaches and problems with balance, coordination, and memory are common symptoms. Loss of consciousness occurs in the event of a serious concussion, but not with every level of injury. Symptoms may show up immediately and last for only a few minutes or can take days or even weeks to appear. Other symptoms may include:

- Blurred vision
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Nausea or vomiting
- Slurred speech
- Feeling confused
- Ringing in the ears
- Difficulty concentrating
- Changes in personality or behavior
- Feeling of sluggishness

Symptoms can last for days or even weeks, but most people recover fully from the effects of a concussion.

Research Has Led to New and More Effective Treatment

We’ve learned a lot about concussions in recent years, and attitudes toward treating them have changed. While concussions used to be downplayed among athletes and others, they are now treated more seriously. Coaches and trainers in sports at every level have become increasingly aware of the problem of concussions. Most have instituted policies that prevent athletes from returning to play until they have been cleared by a medical professional.

If you think you may have suffered a concussion, it is recommended that you seek medical attention for evaluation by a health professional. In the event of a mild or moderate concussion, you likely will be advised to take it easy until your symptoms are gone, whether that be several hours, days, or weeks. Do everything you can to avoid further injury until you’ve completely healed, as compounding injury to the brain can result in permanent damage.

If you’ve suffered a serious concussion with loss of consciousness, you should see a doctor as soon as possible. The doctor will evaluate your cognitive skills by asking you questions to check memory and concentration, and may also conduct other types of tests. If warranted, the doctor may order an MRI or CT scan to make sure there is no bleeding or other serious injury to the brain.

Help Spread the Word

Talk to others about concussions to increase awareness and spread the word about the need to seek medical evaluation if one occurs. The rate of concussions increases during nice weather, meaning that extra precaution is warranted.

WebMD, “Concussion (Traumatic Brain Injury)”

Mayo Clinic, “Concussion”

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