UNIVERSITY STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES • Fact Sheet

HEAD INJURIES

What are the symptoms?
Not all head injuries are concussions. A concussion occurs when a blow to the head causes injury to the brain. Shaking, stretching, tearing, or swelling of brain tissue or nerve fibers can lead to a variety of symptoms, which can last days to weeks or longer:

- Headache
- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Drowsiness
- Trouble concentrating
- Memory loss
- Visual changes
- Nausea or vomiting
- Weakness
- Loss of balance
- Seizures
- Loss of consciousness

How will I be evaluated?
Your healthcare provider will perform a physical exam based on your symptoms and mechanism of injury. A comprehensive neurologic exam that includes a brief memory test will be completed. In certain cases, you may be referred to the emergency room for neck X-rays and/or a computed tomography (CT) scan of the head.

What is the treatment?
In most cases, symptoms resolve with REST and conservative measures:

- Use an ice pack on the injury 20 minutes out of every hour.
- Take acetaminophen (Tylenol) for headache or other causes of pain.
  - Avoid medications like ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin), naproxen (Aleve), and aspirin, as these may decrease the ability of blood to clot if you are bleeding.
- Avoid alcohol and other sedatives.
- Getting lots of REST (both physically and mentally) is the key to recovery! As symptoms improve, you can return slowly to your usual daily routine. Take breaks when you feel fatigued. Returning to normal activities too early will only slow your recovery.
  - Limit exercise. Return gradually to aerobic activity. Add controlled contact sports only after you are symptom-free and remain symptom-free during physical activity.
  - Limit activities that require a lot of concentration, such as sustained computer use and playing video games.
- Have a friend or relative watch you for the next 8-12 hours. You do not need to be awakened while you are sleeping; however, if you exhibit any of the warning signs listed below, you should seek emergency care immediately.
- Close follow-up with your medical provider is important, even if you feel you are recovering. You will also need to return for evaluation if symptoms persist or if new symptoms develop.

You need urgent medical evaluation if you have any of the following:

- Unusual drowsiness, confusion
- Unusual headache
- Unusual behavior
- Difficulty talking
- Unequal pupil sizes
- Sudden or progressive impairment of vision
- Oozing blood or fluid from the ears or nose
- Persistent vomiting
- Trouble using your arms or legs
- Uncontrolled twitching or convulsions

If any of the above symptoms are present, go to the ER (Emergency Room) immediately, as these symptoms may indicate bleeding inside the head.

If you are not sure whether you need to go to the ER, you may call or return to the clinic. A medical provider is available by phone after hours or on holidays in case of emergencies.