

Concussion in infants and toddlers



What is a concussion?

A concussion is a mild traumatic brain injury that changes the way the brain normally works. A concussion is caused by a bump, blow, or hit to the head. Concussions can also occur from a blow to the body that causes the head and brain to move rapidly back and forth. What might look like a mild bump to the head or body can still be enough to cause a concussion. Concussions can have a more serious effect on a young, developing brain and need to be managed correctly.

Common Causes

Ways a young child might get a concussion include:

- Falls (e.g. falling while learning to walk, down stairs, or from a height such as a couch, bed or climbing frame)
- Motor vehicle crashes
- Sports/play activities (e.g. tripping while running to catch a ball, falling off a bike)
- Being struck by or against an object (e.g. colliding with a moving or stationary object such as a wall)
- Assault (including forceful shaking)

No two concussions are alike.

The signs and symptoms experienced can differ from child to child, and different signs and symptoms can appear each time a concussion occurs.

Just one sign or symptom

is enough to indicate that a child may have experienced a concussion.

Signs and Symptoms

You can't see a concussion.

The signs and symptoms of concussion can take time to develop. Sometimes the signs and symptoms appear at the time the concussion occurred, while in other cases they develop (or get worse) in the hours or days that follow. That's why it's important to continue to monitor young children for 24 - 48 hours after a suspected concussion.

Recognising concussion in young children can be difficult as they may not be able to tell you how they are feeling. Look out for physical signs of injury and changes in a child's behaviour that could indicate a possible concussion.

Indicators of concussion in young children include:

- Complaints about their head hurting (headache) or persistent rubbing/holding/touching of head
- Nausea or vomiting
- Unsteady walking, loss of balance or poor coordination
- Loss of ability to carry out newly learned skills (e.g. toilet training, speech)
- Lack of interest in favourite toys
- Cranky, irritable or difficult to console
- Changes in nursing/eating and/or sleeping patterns
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Visual problems
- Tiring easily

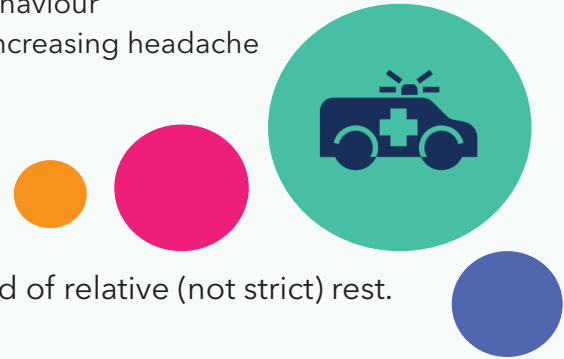
A young child does not have to lose consciousness to have a concussion. In fact, more than 90% of concussions do not involve a loss of consciousness.

Red Flags

Red flags are signs and symptoms that may indicate more severe injury to the brain. If a young child shows any of the following after a suspected concussion, seek medical attention immediately.

- Large bumps, bruises, or unexplained swelling on the head, face or neck
- Loss of consciousness or worsening conscious state (passing out)
- Increased drowsiness (changes to alertness) or hard to wake up
- Seizures or convulsions (twitching or shaking)
- Unequal pupil size in eyes
- Repeated vomiting
- Continuous bleeding or fluid from ear or nose
- Neck pain or tenderness
- Difficulty recognising people or places
- Slurred speech
- Weakness or inability to move body as usual, decreased coordination
- Complaints about numbness, tingling, burning sensation in arms or legs
- Increased restlessness, agitation or confusion
- Unusual behaviour
- Severe or increasing headache

Go to your doctor, nearest hospital or telephone an ambulance.



Concussion Management

The first 24 - 48 hours following a concussion should be a period of relative (not strict) rest. Make sure to follow all advice given to you by the doctor.

Red Flags	Continue to observe young children for 24 - 48 hours following a suspected or diagnosed concussion. Seek immediate medical attention if they show any red flags.
Sleeping	It is ok for your child to sleep after a concussion. They do not need to be woken up during this time but you should check in on them at regular intervals and look out for red flags. Avoid late nights and try to get them to bed at the same time each night.
Regular Routine	Try to maintain your child's normal routines, such as sleeping, naptime, bathing, and mealtime routines. Allow your child to rest for a day or two, avoiding additional activities.
Pain Relief	If your child has pain, give paracetamol and follow the packet instructions. Use ice packs over swollen or painful areas. To do this wrap ice cubes, frozen peas or an ice pack in a towel and apply for 15-20 minutes at a time. This can be done four to eight times a day for up to 72 hours after injury. DO NOT put ice directly on the skin as it is too cold. Caution should be used when applying an ice pack to children under six months of age.
Cognitive Activity	Limit screen time in the first 48 hours.

Avoid activities that can lead to another head injury while the child is still recovering. Such as:

- Playing on ride-along toys, scooters or bicycles
- Ball games
- Running, wrestling or climbing activities
- Playground activities, especially those that involve height (e.g. slides, swings)
- Using stairs or ramps unsupervised

Return to daycare and learning activities

If your child attends daycare or is being looked after by family or friends, let them know that your child has had a concussion. Ask them to monitor for new or existing symptoms and any red flags that require immediate medical attention. Your child may need to return to learning activities slowly by:

- Starting with a few hours activity at a time, gradually building up to a full day
- Changing their timetable
- Taking rest breaks when needed.

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