

# Concussion in Infants and Toddlers (0 - 3)

## What is a concussion?

A concussion is a type of mild traumatic brain injury that may temporarily affect brain function. Concussions are caused by an impact to the head, neck or body that causes the head and brain to move rapidly back and forth. What might look like a mild bump to the head can be enough to cause a concussion. Concussions can have a more serious effect on a young, developing brain and need to be managed correctly.

**An infant/toddler does not have to lose consciousness to have a concussion.**

The most common ways infants/toddlers may suffer a concussion are from falls, road traffic crashes, sport or play activities, being struck by an object, or from an assault.

## How do I know if an infant/toddler has a concussion?

**You can't see a concussion.** Concussion can result in many different signs (things you can see, such as a fall or knocking their head) and symptoms (things they are experiencing). Some symptoms will be immediate, however some may show up in the days that follow. It's important to look out for physical signs of injury and changes in behaviour that could indicate concussion – this can be difficult as infants/toddlers may be unable to tell you if they are feeling unwell, so you should continue to monitor infants/toddlers for 48 hours after a hit to the head.

**Just one sign or symptom is enough to indicate that they may have a concussion.**

### Possible indicators of concussion in infants/toddlers include:

- Complaints about their head hurting 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. using the toilet, 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

## Red flags - when to seek immediate medical attention

Red flags are signs and symptoms that may indicate more severe injury to the brain. If an infant/toddler shows any **red flags seek medical attention immediately.**

- Large bumps, bruises, or swelling on the head, face or neck
- Loss of consciousness
- Increased drowsiness 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, confusion, or unusual behaviour

## Concussion Management and Recovery

The first 24-48 hours following a concussion should be a period of relative (not strict) rest. Following on from this time period your infant/toddler may still take a number of weeks to recover.

Things that may assist in managing a concussion in infants/toddlers during this time include:

- Continued observation and seeking immediate medical attention for any Red Flags.
- Follow packet instructions for paracetamol if required. Icepacks can be used on painful areas for up to 15 - 20 minutes at a time for the initial period following 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.
- Allowing the infant/toddler to sleep as usual. They do not need to be woken up during the night, but it's a good idea to check on them at regular intervals for red flags.
- Maintain normal routines including meals, baths and bed times.
- Limiting screen time.

Avoid activities that can lead to another head injury while the infant/toddler is still recovering. Examples of these activities may include playing on ride-along toys, scooters or bicycles, wrestling or climbing activities, playground activities such as swings or slides, and using stairs or ramps unsupervised.

## Return to daycare and learning activities

If the infant/toddler attends daycare or is being looked after by family members or friends, advise of the concussion and to continue to monitor any signs or symptoms being experienced, or development of red flags.

An infant/toddler may need to return to learning activities slowly by:

- Starting with a few hours and building up to a full day.
- Modifying or slightly reducing their learning routine.
- Taking rest breaks when needed.

## More information:

Connectivity Traumatic Brain Injury Australia is an Australia-wide not-for-profit organisation working to raise awareness of concussion and traumatic brain injury in the community. For more information on concussion, you can speak to your doctor, healthcare professional, or visit the Connectivity website at [www.connectivity.org.au](http://www.connectivity.org.au)



Disclaimer: This flyer and the Connectivity website does not offer medical advice for individuals. If you have suffered a concussion, please seek medical advice.