

After a Concussion

Playing contact sports is just one way people get concussions, which are brain injuries caused by a forceful hit to the head. They can also result from car crashes, falls and other accidents, or military combat.

“Usually concussion symptoms appear right away or shortly after the injury. But in some cases, symptoms are delayed for days or even months.”

Symptoms include confusion, irritability, memory loss, headache, dizziness, blurry vision, nausea or vomiting, and sometimes a loss of consciousness. Anyone with a suspected concussion should see a health care provider right away.

“Typically, we’ll evaluate somebody’s vision and balance, as well as memory when we’re evaluating for a concussion.”

In some cases, a CT scan or other imaging test may be done to check for bleeding or swelling in the brain. People need to be closely monitored for the first 24 hours after a concussion. They should not sleep for long stretches and should be awakened periodically to make sure their symptoms aren’t getting worse. Symptoms requiring immediate medical help include trouble waking up, severe headache, vomiting, seizures, confusion, and problems with speech, vision or balance.

“The best treatment for concussion is rest. That includes avoiding sports, homework, video games and TV.”

Athletes should wait to get back into the game until their provider has cleared them. Getting a second concussion before the first one has healed can increase the risk of long-term problems and permanent brain damage.

“Most people start to feel better a couple of weeks after the injury, but sometimes recovery can take a month or longer. If you’re not getting better or have any concerns, it’s always a good idea to contact your health care provider.”