

Heads Up: Concussions In Youth Sports

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What Is A Concussion?

A concussion is a traumatic brain injury that alters the way your brain functions. Although concussions usually are caused by a blow to the head, even a “ding,” “getting your bell rung,” or what seems to be a mild bump or blow to the head can be serious. As many as 3.8 million sports- and recreation-related concussions occur in the United States each year.

Signs & Symptoms

- Headache or a feeling of pressure in the head
- Temporary loss of consciousness
- Confusion or feeling as if in a fog
- Amnesia surrounding the traumatic event
- Dizziness or “seeing stars”
- Ringing in the ears
- Nausea or vomiting
- Slurred speech

Some symptoms of concussions may be immediate or delayed in onset by hours or days after injury:

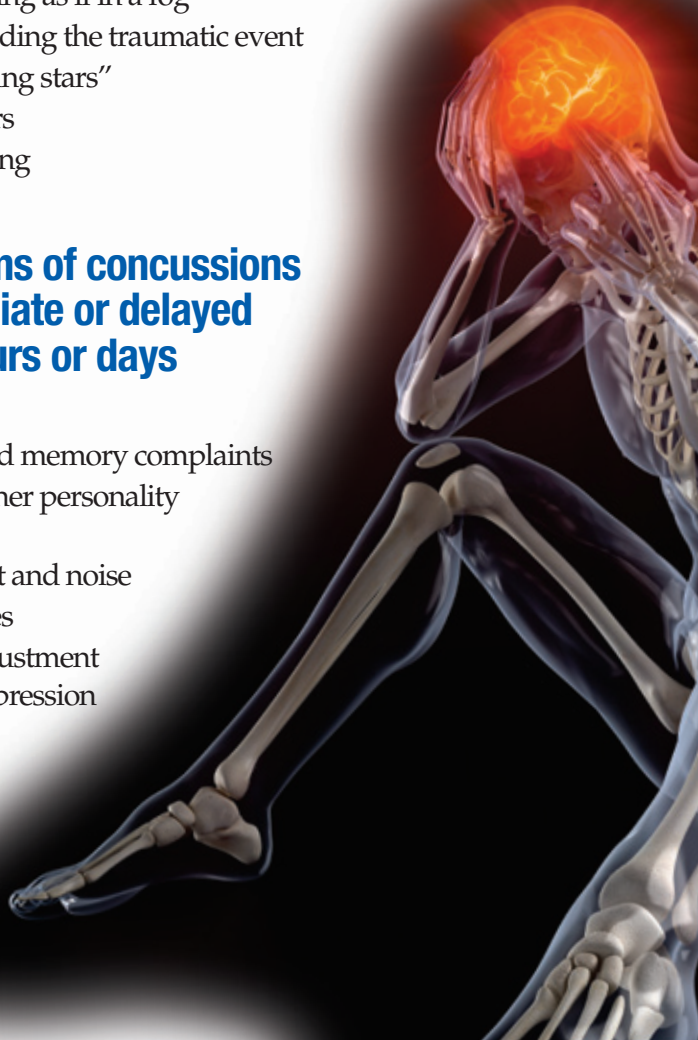
- Concentration and memory complaints
- Irritability and other personality changes
- Sensitivity to light and noise
- Sleep disturbances
- Psychological adjustment problems and depression
- Disorders of taste and smell



Danger Signs for Parents

Be alert for symptoms that worsen over time. Your child or teen should be seen in an Emergency Department right away if s/he has:

- One pupil (the black part in the middle of the eye) larger than the other
- Difficult to arouse
- Severe headache or worsening headache
- Weakness, numbness, or decreased coordination
- Repeated vomiting or nausea
- Slurred speech
- Convulsions or seizures
- Difficulty recognizing people or places
- Increasing confusion, restlessness, or agitation
- Unusual behavior
- Loss of consciousness (even a brief loss of consciousness should be taken seriously)



Prevention & Preparation

As a coach, you can play a key role in preventing concussions and responding to them properly when they occur.

- Educate athletes and parents about concussions.
- Insist that safety comes first.
- Teach athletes and parents that it's not smart to play with a concussion.
- Prevent long-term problems by keeping athletes with known or suspected concussions from play until they have been evaluated and given permission to return to play by a healthcare professional.
- It's better to miss one game than the whole season.

Action Plan

What should a coach do when a concussion is suspected?

1. Remove the athlete from play. Look for signs and symptoms of a concussion. When in doubt, keep the athlete out.
2. Ensure that the athlete is evaluated right away by an appropriate healthcare professional. Do not try to judge the severity of the injury yourself.
3. Inform the athlete's parents or guardians about the possible concussion. Make sure they know that the athlete should be seen by a healthcare professional experienced in evaluating for a concussion.
4. Allow the athlete to gradually* return to play only with **written** permission from a health care professional with experience in evaluating concussions. A repeat concussion before the brain recovers from the first concussion can slow recovery or increase the likelihood of having long-term problems.

*The Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association (WIAA) recommends the following steps when returning an athlete to play after a concussion. Progress to the next step **ONLY** when the athlete can perform the current step without any signs or symptoms:

- Step 1:** About 15 minutes of light exercise: stationary biking or jogging.
- Step 2:** More strenuous running and sprinting in the gym or field without equipment.
- Step 3:** Begin non-contact drills in full uniform. May also resume weightlifting.
- Step 4:** Full practice with contact.
- Step 5:** Full game clearance.

Post-Concussion Evaluation

- **Barron:** 715-537-9905
- **Eau Claire:** 715-464-DING (3464)
- **Menomonie:** 715-233-7777

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ImPACT Testing

It can be difficult to determine when an athlete's brain has healed from a concussion. ImPACT testing takes out some of the guesswork in tracking a concussion and determining when it's safe for an athlete to return to sport.

With ImPACT testing, athletes undergo a computerized screening that captures a baseline measurement of memory, reaction time and other neurological functions disrupted from a concussion. If an athlete sustains a head injury, they are then retested to determine when their brains have returned to normal functioning.

Many area schools provide baseline ImPACT testing for their athletes. Otherwise schedule a baseline test with Mayo Clinic Health System:

- **Eau Claire:** 715-464-DING (3464)
- **Menomonie:** 715-233-7740
- **Rice Lake:** 715-537-9905

Remember: Even a "ding" can be a serious injury.