

A concussion is basically a bruised brain. And just like a bruise on your arm or knee, it usually only needs some time to heal on its own. However, unlike a regular bruise, there are a few extra precautions to take to prevent making the injury worse and risking permanent brain damage.

How do I know they really have a concussion?

When we think of a concussion, we often picture a football player who took a hit to the head, a basketball player who came down on her head after a contested rebound, or a wrestler who hit the mat head first in a take-down. Often these athletes lose consciousness and/or act like “they got their bell rung” afterward. While these student athletes definitely would have concussions, not all stories are quite so dramatic. In fact, more than 90% of concussions do not result in a loss of consciousness. Any of the following symptoms within a few hours of a head injury could be a sign of concussion, and all of them need to be treated with equal seriousness:

- Headache
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Dizziness or unsteadiness with standing or walking
- Difficulty remembering things that happened before or after the injury
- Trouble with concentration
- Changes in sleep (sleeping more or less than usual, being extra drowsy during the day)
- Emotional changes (being more irritable than usual, crying for no good reason)
- Doing things more slowly, almost like “being stuck in slow motion”

(Note that no expensive brain scans or tests are required!)

How do you treat a concussion?

There are two main elements that allow the brain to heal after concussion: restricting physical activity and resting the brain. It also helps to make sure your child is getting plenty of sleep each night.

- 1) **Physical rest:** As long as ANY of the above symptoms are present, a person with concussion should not play sports. This means no practice, no PE, and no competing. Hobbies like biking, skateboarding, cartwheeling, climbing – basically anything that risks them hitting their head – are off-limits.
- 2) **Brain rest:** If activities like playing video games or doing difficult homework causes the above symptoms, they should be avoided. Even if your child doesn’t seem bothered by these tasks, it’s still a good idea to minimize or eliminate loud music, watching TV, using a smartphone, and playing video games for the first few days after a concussion.

Can they still go to school?

For the majority of kids, the answer is yes. However, if schoolwork triggers a worsening of your child's headache, dizziness, etc., they may need to stay home from school for a day or two. They should return once they can tolerate 30-45 minutes of mental stimulation (this includes watching TV or texting their friends).

When can they start practicing/playing again?

Once a child is totally free of symptoms, they can start working their way back to full play. First, they have to be totally back to their schoolwork and off any meds used to treat their symptoms (such as off Tylenol for headaches). Then they'll need a full neurological exam, which includes "provocative testing" (which means I'll have them run stairs or run up and down a hill a few times to make sure concussion symptoms are not triggered by the exercise.) Once they are medically cleared, they'll gradually increase their activity over several days according to a prescribed "Warm up to Play" protocol.

Awww, come on, Doc! There's a big game coming up – does my child really have to sit out?

YES! While physical rest is an important part of healing, that's not the main reason for sitting out of practice. During the time your child is healing, it takes far less force for them to have a second concussion compared to the first. What first took a tackle on the field, a slam on the mat, or a hit on the hardwood, may now take only a bump to the head. And with a second concussion on top of an unhealed first concussion, there's a risk that the second one can be fatal. This is called **second-impact syndrome**, and it can leave your child with permanent brain damage or even cause death. **IT IS SIMPLY NOT WORTH THE RISK!**

How long does it usually take to heal from a concussion?

Most concussions heal up in 1-2 weeks. In rare cases it takes longer.

My child has a concussion, am I supposed to keep him/her awake?

No, this is an old medical myth. Sleep is helpful to rest the brain. However, it is generally a good idea to wake them up every hour or two for the first 10-12 hours after the injury, just to make sure they're not getting worse.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT: www.kansasconcussion.org

WE LOVE WATCHING OUR KIDS COMPETE, BUT WE MUST ALWAYS KEEP OUR PRIORITIES STRAIGHT, AND REMEMBER:

WE WANT THE BEST FUTURE POSSIBLE FOR OUR KIDS.

PERMANENT BRAIN DAMAGE

IS NOT PART OF A KID'S BEST POSSIBLE FUTURE.