How Can I Help My Child Recover After a Concussion?

CDC HEADS UP
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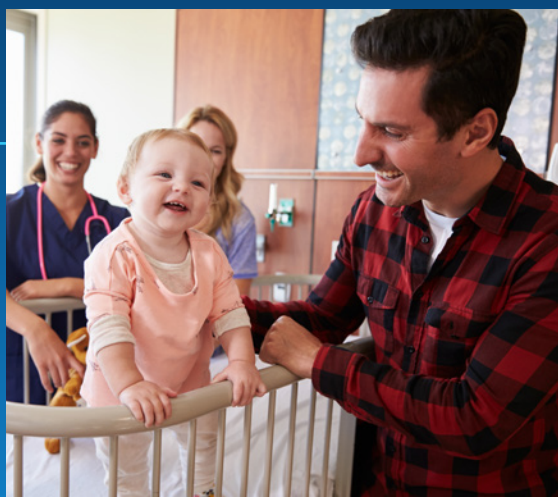
This handout describes common concussion symptoms your child may experience, and tips you can use to help with their recovery.



Most children with a concussion, a type of traumatic brain injury, feel better within a couple of weeks. However, for some, symptoms will last for a month or longer. Concussion symptoms appear as part of the normal healing process and may change as your child gets back to his or her regular activities. **If there are any symptoms that concern you, or are getting worse, be sure to seek medical care as soon as possible.**

CONCUSSION RECOVERY TIPS

Making short-term changes to your child's daily activities can help him or her get back to a regular routine more quickly. As your child begins to feel better, you can slowly remove these changes. Use your child's symptoms to guide his or her return to normal activities. If your child's symptoms do not worsen during an activity, then that activity is OK for them. If symptoms worsen, your child should cut back that activity.

It is important to remember that each concussion and each child is unique, so your child's recovery should be customized based on his or her symptoms. Factors that may delay recovery include your child having: a history of a previous concussion or other brain injury, neurological or mental health disorders, learning difficulties, or family and social stressors.

QUICK TIPS

Ensure your child avoids activities that can put him or her at risk for another injury to the head and brain.

Help your child keep a positive attitude. Most children with a concussion feel better within a couple of weeks.

Ensure your child gets enough rest.

CONCUSSION RECOVERY TIPS

The chart below lists concussion symptoms your child may experience, and tips to address each symptom. Many of the tips can help with more than one symptom. These tips offer temporary changes you can make to help your child's recovery.

PHYSICAL

Concussion Symptoms	How Your Child May Feel or Act	Tips to Help with Your Child's Recovery
Headaches	• Trouble with concentration • Increased irritability	• Explore setting up school rest breaks (in a quiet place) • Shorten school day if symptoms do not get better • Lessen the amount of time your child uses screens (computers, tablets, smartphones, etc.) if these activities make symptoms worse • Give your child ibuprofen or acetaminophen to help with pain (if approved by their doctor)
Bothered by light or noise	• Symptoms worsen in bright or loud environments	• Have your child wear sunglasses or a hat when outside, or when exposed to bright lights or sunlight • Lessen the amount of time your child uses screens (computers, tablets, etc.) if these activities make symptoms worse • Help your child avoid noisy/crowded places. If needed, your child can wear earplugs or headphones
Dizziness or balance problems	• Unsteady when walking • Nausea or vomiting	• Take steps to avoid a fall that could put your child at risk for another injury to the head or brain during their recovery • Avoid crowded areas
Feeling tired	• Lack of energy	• Shorten school day if symptoms do not get better • Provide rest breaks in a quiet place at school, or at home during the day, as needed

THINKING OR REMEMBERING

Concussion Symptoms	How Your Child May Feel or Act	Tips to Help with Your Child's Recovery
Attention or concentration problems	• Only able to focus on school work for short amounts of time	• Shorten tasks • Break down tasks into smaller activities or steps • Lessen school workload or amount of activity • Avoid cognitive activities (thinking or remembering) that can cause symptoms to worsen
Short-term memory problems	• Trouble remembering instructions or keeping information and ideas in mind during tasks	• Repeat directions or key information • Provide written notes
Long-term memory problems	• Trouble with learning new information or remembering information already learned	• Repeat directions or key information • Provide reminders, or tie information to familiar things, such as: events, objects, or people • Break down information into smaller chunks or pieces
Feeling slowed down	• Unable to keep pace with workload • Slower reading, writing, or calculation • Difficulty processing verbal information effectively	• Talk with your child's school about extending deadlines to complete homework, assignments, and tests • Reduce or slow down how quickly information is presented and check for understanding throughout the activity
Foggy or groggy	• Less mental energy • Trouble thinking clearly • Trouble formulating thoughts	• Provide rest breaks during activities throughout the day (at school or home) • Set aside a quiet place at home for school work or other learning activities

SOCIAL OR EMOTIONAL

Irritability or easily angered	• Trouble dealing with stress	• Look for opportunities to lessen the amount of stress your child may feel • Provide a place for your child to take quiet rest breaks, as needed • Do deep breathing exercises with your child • Encourage your child to talk to a trusted adult or friend • Remind your child that most people feel better soon after a concussion

Concussion Symptoms	How Your Child May Feel or Act	Tips to Help with Your Child's Recovery
Anxiety or nervousness	• Worried about falling behind, or pressure to ignore symptoms	• Talk with your child's school about extending time to complete homework, assignments, and tests • Help your child stay positive (most children with a concussion feel better within a couple of weeks)
Sadness or withdrawal	• Withdrawal from school or friends because of stigma or activity restrictions	• Give your child time to talk with and stay connected to friends • Help your child stay connected to teammates, even if he or she is not participating • Talk with your doctor if depression is worrisome
SLEEP		
Sleeping more than usual	• Hard to wake up, shifted sleep schedule	• Explore setting up a later school start time • Allow for rest breaks during the day, as needed • Keep to a set bedtime routine with fixed sleep and wake up times as much as possible
Sleeping less than usual	• Irritable, lack of energy	• Avoid screen time and loud music right before bed • Sleep in a dark, cool room • Keep to a set bedtime routine with fixed sleep and wake up times as much as possible
Trouble falling asleep	• Tired, groggy	• Limit daytime naps or return to your child's regular daytime nap schedule (as appropriate for their age) • Keep to a set bedtime routine with fixed sleep and wake up times as much as possible

WHAT IF MY CHILD ISN'T GETTING BETTER?

Talk with your child's doctor if you do not feel like your child is getting better. Your child may need to see a specialist who has experience treating brain injuries. Ask your child's doctor for the names of brain injury specialists in your area.

Information in this handout is based on *CDC's Guideline on the Diagnosis and Management of Mild Traumatic Brain Injury Among Children*. More information on the Guideline and concussion, as well as, tips to help your child feel better and steps you can take to help your child safely return to school and sports can be found at www.cdc.gov/HEADSUP.

The information provided in this handout or through linkages to other sites is not a substitute for medical or professional care. Questions about diagnosis and treatment for a concussion should be directed to your child's doctor or other healthcare provider.