



Concussions in Sports Dr. George Eastman

A concussion is an injury to the brain, usually caused by a blow to the head. Symptoms of a concussion include confusion, headache, nausea, balance problems, amnesia, and loss of consciousness. Most concussions do not result in a loss of consciousness.

There are an estimated 300,000 concussions per year from sports. High-risk sports include contact and collision sports such as football, ice hockey, rugby, wrestling, lacrosse, and, to a lesser extent, soccer and basketball. Younger players are more prone to concussions and to more serious concussions because of their immature nervous systems. Also, females are more likely to sustain a concussion than are males and tend to take longer to recover.

Any athlete sustaining a suspected concussion should be evaluated on the field or sidelines for severity of the injury using one of the validated sideline tools, such as the Sport Concussion Assessment Tool (SCAT) found at http://www.csmfoundation.org/SCAT_Card.pdf.

When to return to play decisions following a concussion is based on attempting to prevent serious complications such as second-impact syndrome or permanent brain damage. Second-impact syndrome occurs when a player returns to play before the symptoms of a concussion clear. A second, often minor, blow to the head can then lead sudden brain swelling and rapid death.

Because of their immature brains, athletes less than age 18 are particularly vulnerable to this problem. For this reason, no one under age 18 should ever return to play on the same day as a concussion occurs and no athlete should return to play until all symptoms have cleared, which may take several days. The treatment for a concussion is rest - that means no exertion, physical or mental. No video games, text messaging, cramming for tests, or, in some cases, school. Symptoms will usually clear over a period of several days. After symptoms clear, the athlete should follow a stepwise and graded exercise program as recommended by the AAN (American Academy of Neurology) to ensure full recovery before return to play. This program will usually take several days to a week to complete. If the concussion was severe or if it was not a first concussion, the time to return to play may be a month or longer.

It is important that you not allow your child to return to play too early. Returning to participation before complete recovery will greatly increase the risk of developing long-term or even deadly complications.