

VCH Caring for Your Child After a Concussion

Your child has been diagnosed with a concussion. A concussion temporarily changes how the brain works for a short time. Signs and symptoms of one can show up right after the injury, or they may not appear or be noticed until days after the injury. Follow these instructions to keep your child safe and help them get better.

What are the common signs of a concussion?

Physical

- headache
- feeling sick to your stomach
- throwing up
- dizziness
- balance problems
- having trouble seeing or focusing
- getting tired easily
- being sensitive to light or noise
- being sensitive to smells or tastes
- ringing sound in the ears
- numbness.

Mental

- feeling “foggy”
- feeling slowed down
- having a hard time remembering things
- having a hard time concentrating.

Sleep changes

- feeling drowsy
- sleeping less or more than usual
- having a hard time falling asleep.

Mood changes

- being easily bothered
- feeling sadness
- feeling more emotional than usual
- feeling nervous.

How do I care for my child?

It's okay for your child to:

- take acetaminophen (Tylenol), or ibuprofen (Motrin or Advil) for headache
- use an ice pack on the head or neck
- go to sleep (there's no need to wake up every hour)
- rest (there's no need to make them stay in bed).

Do not let your child:

- drive while having any signs of concussion
- exercise or lift heavy weights
- drink alcohol
- take part in sports or high-risk activities.

How do I help my child return to normal, daily activities?

Your child will need help from you, teachers, and coaches to help manage their daily activity. We recommend rest for the first 48 to 72 hours after injury, then they should slowly increase their activity. At first, they should participate in light aerobic activities, such as walking or riding a stationary bike. If any of their symptoms get worse, have them stop these activities and rest.

Do not let your child do any high-risk activities that may cause another head injury until your child is checked and cleared by a licensed healthcare provider. High-risk activities include all sports, physical education class, trampolines, and riding an all-terrain vehicle (ATV).

Make sure your child gets good sleep at night. Let them take naps, if needed. Do not let them stay up late or have sleepovers until symptoms are gone.

What about going back to daycare or school?

If your child can't concentrate for more than 30 to 45 minutes, you may need to keep them at home until problems improve. When they are well enough to go back to school, let their teachers, school nurse, school counselor, and administrators know about the injury and problems they're having.

The school can help your child return to school safely by:

- giving at least one rest break per day
 - reducing workload and being flexible with due dates
 - keeping them out of noisy areas
 - holding off giving standardized tests.
- As your child improves, these accommodations can be removed.

The school should watch for signs of problems getting worse, especially:

- increased problems paying attention, remembering, or learning new information
- needing a longer time to complete a task
- increased irritability
- unable to cope with stress.

What about returning to sports?

Tennessee Youth Concussion Law states that a child diagnosed with a concussion may not return to sports (practice or games) until they are cleared by a licensed healthcare provider.

You must follow up with your child's primary doctor or specialist for clearance to return to full activity. Until cleared to return to activity, they cannot take part in physical education class, practices, or games. Because signs of concussion may last for several days, and because sometimes more problems show up over time, your child will not be cleared to return to activity by the emergency room provider.

Tell the physical education teacher and all coaches about the injury and the problems your child is having. Your child may feel frustrated, sad, and even angry because they can't go back to sports or recreation right away. Remind them that after a head injury, it's important to wait for a full recovery before going back to sports. This will lower the chances of them getting hurt again.

What is the stairstep program to return to sports?

When your child's provider gives the okay to return to activity, your child should **slowly** increase activity following these steps. They should do one step every 24 hours:

1. no activity and rest
2. light aerobic activity (walking, gentle swimming, gentle stretching exercises)
3. heavier aerobic activity (running, cycling, or other ways to increase heart rate)
4. sport-specific training conditioning drills
5. non-contact practice drills
6. full-contact drills with no restrictions
7. game play.

Do not let your child go to the next step until their body is ready. If any signs of concussion return with a new step, they should start back at Step 1 and follow-up with their provider. It's very important to talk to their provider about any concussion signs. Having problems means their brain has not fully healed.

When should we follow-up with my child's provider?

Contact your child's primary care provider for a concussion follow-up appointment within 1 to 2 weeks. If your child's problems last longer than 1 to 2 weeks, ask their provider if they should see a specialist at Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt.

– Sports-related concussion follow-up: Call the **Vanderbilt Sports Concussion Clinic** at (615) 875-8722

– Non-sports-related concussion follow-up: Call the **Pediatric Neurosurgery Clinic** at (615) 322-6875

Call your child's primary care provider or return to the nearest emergency department right away if your child or infant:

- has a headache that gets worse
- has a seizure
- has an unusual change in behavior
- cannot stop throwing up
- is lethargic (so tired you cannot wake them up)
- slurs their speech
- is very irritable or annoyed
- cannot recognize people or places
- is more and more confused
- is not responding like normal
- has neck pain
- has arms or legs that are weak or numb
- won't stop crying
- won't nurse or eat

Follow these care instructions carefully. If your child has problems that we didn't list or you have any other concerns, call their primary care provider right away.