

What is a Concussion?

A concussion, also known as a mild traumatic brain injury, occurs from a blow to the head, or violent shaking.

Signs and Symptoms

Some immediate signs that a child has sustained a concussion include:

- Appears dazed
- Confused
- Poor balance and lack of coordination
- Answers questions slowly
- Runs in the wrong direction
- Forgets events that occurred before and after impact
- Loss of consciousness - but it is important to remember that a child can sustain a concussion without losing consciousness

A child may complain of:

- Headache
- Nausea and vomiting
- Double or blurred vision
- Confusion
- Fatigue
- Poor concentration
- Memory problems
- Sleep difficulties
- Irritability
- Sensitivity to noise and light and ringing in ears

If a Child is Concussed:

TAKE IT SERIOUSLY! The child should be seen by a doctor following a concussion.

A child should rest following a concussion BUT if they sleep rouse them half hourly during the first 4 hours.

Take the child to hospital/call 111 if he or she:

- Has a headache that gets worse
- Is very drowsy or can't be woken up
- Passes out or has a blackout
- Vomits more than 3 times
- Can't recognise places or people
- Behaves unusually or seems confused
- Is very irritable
- Slurs speech
- Has weak arms or legs, or is unsteady on feet
- Has seizures

Prevention is better than cure:

Teachers, parents and coaches can help children learn to play safely to avoid brain injuries by:

- Encouraging the wearing of helmets and other protective gear when cycling and playing sports
- Ensuring children wear seat belts
- Ensuring children are aware of the road and cycle rules
- Encouraging safe play in the playground
- Enforcing a stand down period from sport for any children who sustain a brain injury or concussion

For further information, contact your local Liaison Officer on 0800 272 464 or

The Brain Injury Association of New Zealand Inc
cc10398

Phone: 09 414 5693

Fax: 09 415 5643

Email: national@brain-injury.org.nz

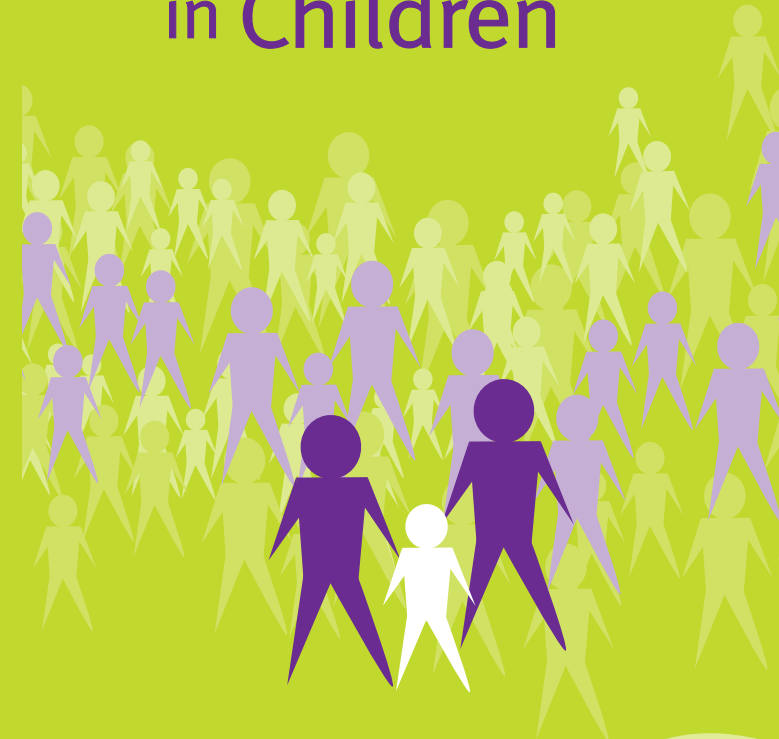
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Concussion in Children



**Tips for
parents, teachers
and coaches
of children with
a concussion**

Difficulties commonly experienced after a concussion and how to manage these


 **Fatigue and headaches** are very common following a brain injury. The need for rest and sleep is increased and the student will have less energy and tire more quickly. They are likely to experience headaches due to tiredness, excessive noise or after periods of concentration.

The child may show signs of:

- Being obviously tired, yawning in class
- Being passive or withdrawn
- Drifting off task, 'switching off' and day dreaming
- Deteriorating behaviour as they become more fatigued

How you can assist:

- Encourage a gradual return to school starting with only a couple of hours initially, building to half and then full days as tolerated
- Recognise that the child may tire quickly and provide opportunities to rest as needed

 **Cognitive problems** are also very common and may impact on the child's ability to learn. These problems can include but are not limited to:

- Memory problems
- Attention/concentration difficulties
- Slowed thinking
- Problem solving
- Decreased comprehension
- Poor organisation
- Visual and/or auditory processing problems

The child may show signs of:

- Finding it difficult to stay on task
- Being easily distracted
- Having difficulty completing work

- Forgetting what they have been asked to do, so need instructions to be repeated or written down
- Problems organising their approach to tasks
- Finding it hard to get started on tasks
- Difficulty with problem solving
- Problems expressing their thoughts clearly, either verbally or in writing

How you can assist:

- Provide a quiet learning environment
- Seat the child near the teacher and away from windows, doors and talkative children to reduce distractions
- Maintain a structured and consistent routine
- Give instructions one step at a time
- Provide written instructions for multi step tasks
- Ask the child to repeat information back to you to check they have understood
- Provide extra opportunities to practice new skills
- Provide more time for the completion of tasks
- Identify how the child learns best and provide learning opportunities in this mode
- Be flexible in your expectations
- Ask for assistance from other agencies as required

Behavioural and emotional problems

Brain injury can cause changes in the way people behave. Pre-existing personality traits can be accentuated by the injury and children are frequently less able to control their emotions and behaviour and may exercise poor judgement while they are recovering from a brain injury.

The child may show signs of:

- Restlessness and/or hyperactivity
- Being more passive and withdrawn

- Increased irritability and/or frustration
- Anger outbursts, increased aggression, challenging or more defiant behaviour
- Mood swings, emotional outbursts
- Being impulsive and saying or doing inappropriate things e.g. swearing
- Talking more (or sometimes less)

How you can assist:

- Maintain a structured routine with clear expectations of appropriate behaviours
- It is important to recognise the brain injury as the cause of the behavioural problems, and not to label the child as a behaviour problem
- Be aware of the fatigue factor and build in regular rest breaks
- Discuss and reinforce the rules regularly

When can children return to sport/PE?

It is important to avoid further injury. Vigorous activities including contact sports and playing on playground equipment should be avoided until the child has been free of symptoms for a week. Concussion can affect their coordination and reflexes, which puts them at risk of another injury if they return to sport too soon. If in doubt seek clearance from their GP or other health professionals involved.