

# **SPORTS CONCUSSION NEW ENGLAND**

## **Smarter, Safer Concussion Management for the Student Athlete**

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### **Information for Parents**

Organized sports provide our children with special opportunities for character building and physical development. Particularly in the contact sports, these opportunities come with risks. While we want our children to be able to play hard, learn to push ahead through adversity and be successful, we first want them to be safe. Each season in football, soccer, hockey, wrestling, lacrosse and rugby up to 10% of a team's players will suffer concussions. These injuries are also common and just as serious in basketball, baseball, diving and other sports.

#### **What is a concussion?**

A concussion is a mild traumatic brain injury. Concussions are usually caused by a direct hit to the head but can also occur from a blow to the body that sends whiplash forces to the brain.

#### **Does a concussion have to involve loss of consciousness?**

No. Most concussions do not. In fact, athletes will often continue playing in spite of these injuries, sometimes making concussions difficult to detect at first.

#### **How do I know if my son or daughter has had a concussion?**

Any athlete who has had a concussion will have had a blow to the head or body and will show some of the following symptoms:



- **PHYSICAL:** Headache, dizziness, nausea; visual changes such as double or blurry vision, flashing lights, unusual colors; balance problems, drowsiness, fatigue, sleep difficulties, AND/OR trouble tolerating light or noise
- **COGNITIVE:** Confusion, disorientation or feeling mentally "foggy," feeling "slowed down" in thinking, trouble focusing and concentrating, forgetfulness or poor short-term memory AND/OR word-finding problems
- **EMOTIONAL:** Irritability, unusual moodiness, sadness, nervousness or anxiety, AND/OR depression.

Some of these symptoms will appear immediately after the blow. Some may quickly disappear while other symptoms can increase or develop hours or even days after the injury.

#### **What should I do if my son or daughter has had a concussion?**

1. **Obtain medical consultation.** Athletes who have been unconscious, even briefly, should be taken to a hospital or doctor's office for evaluation to rule out conditions such as bleeding in the brain or fractures. For concussions not involving loss of consciousness, families will usually call their child's primary care doctor right away to report symptoms and status. Your doctor will then advise you as to whether your child should be seen in a hospital Emergency Department, at the doctor's office, or monitored at home.
2. **REST** is the main treatment for a concussion. Doing as little as possible will allow symptoms to begin clearing.
3. **Make sure your child receives proper evaluation** by a specialist who understands current standards in sports concussion management and can help determine when it will be safe for your child to resume playing their contact sport.

### How long will symptoms last?

In milder cases, symptoms last only minutes to hours. For athletes who have taken a more severe blow or who have had multiple concussions, symptoms may last for weeks or even months.

### Will my son or daughter recover completely from a concussion?

Most athletes who have had concussions recover fully and can return safely to their regular sports activity **IF** the injury is identified right away **AND** they rest until they are fully recovered. Athletes who have had too many concussions or who return to play too soon after injury may risk significant problems.

### What are the risks of returning to play too soon after a concussion?

The most common risk is causing symptoms that would clear up more quickly to be prolonged for weeks or even months. Athletes who have had too many concussions and return too soon also risk developing very long lasting or permanent symptoms. The most alarming risk of all is Second Impact Syndrome, in which an athlete who has returned to play while still symptomatic sustains a second concussion, resulting in severe permanent neurological disability or death. Fortunately, these cases are very rare but almost always involve high school age athletes.

### When is it safe for my son or daughter to return to sports action after a concussion?

Concussion experts agree that no athlete should be back playing a contact sport while they still have **any** symptoms. Even for athletes who are beginning to feel better, exercise such as running or weightlifting may cause symptoms to worsen or return if they have not sufficiently recovered. Many student athletes say or think they are fully recovered when they are still symptomatic. This usually happens because they don't want to miss playing time or let their team and coach down or perhaps because they don't understand the risks of returning to action too soon.

### Can a concussion affect my child's school performance?

Yes. Many of the symptoms listed above can make it difficult for your child to do as well as usual in school. This may be a problem only for a few days in milder cases. In more severe concussions trouble with headaches, concentration, fatigue, etc. may persist for weeks or months and cause trouble with focusing and remembering in class, homework, and exams. Students with extended symptoms will benefit from office consultation, which allows a closer look at their academic difficulties and specific school accommodations that can help during their recovery.

### What is the value of neuropsychological testing like ImPACT<sup>®</sup>?

ImPACT<sup>®</sup> is a very sensitive test that measures recovery of cognitive functions such as memory, attention and speed of thinking that are typically affected by a concussion. Testing while your child is still recovering from symptoms and again when he or she feels symptom-free helps determine if thinking skills are back to where they should be. This approach has become the standard in most professional sports and provides extra assurance that an athlete is really ready for contact again.

### How can I arrange for my child to take a baseline ImPACT<sup>®</sup> test?

If your child's school or sports team already uses ImPACT<sup>®</sup>, baseline testing will be administered at school by your athletic trainer. If your child's school or sports team does not have ImPACT<sup>®</sup>, the test can be taken by appointment at our office in Brookline. Test results will be saved by our office and will be available if your child is ever suspected of having a concussion. Call our office for an appointment at 617-553-8096 or 617-959-1010.

### My son or daughter has recently had a concussion and has not had a baseline test. Is it too late for them to be tested?

Not at all. ImPACT<sup>®</sup> baseline testing is very valuable but not completely necessary for good management of an athlete's concussion. When your son or daughter is tested with ImPACT<sup>®</sup> after injury, the test's norms show professionals how they are scoring relative to others their age and gender. This information, along with a careful clinical interview to check for continuing symptoms, provides for excellent management of your child's recovery.

### TO CONTACT US:

- To refer your student athlete for office consultation or to arrange for a baseline test, contact our office manager Debbie Ely at [dely@sportsconcussion.net](mailto:dely@sportsconcussion.net) or 617-553-8096.
- Visit our website for more information at [www.sportsconcussion.net](http://www.sportsconcussion.net)
- Questions for Dr. McGrath? Email him at [dr.neal@sportsconcussion.net](mailto:dr.neal@sportsconcussion.net) or call 617-959-1010.