

Splurge - Volume 8 Issue 2 (February 2013)

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THE TRUTH ABOUT CONCUSSIONS

A controversial diagnosis is back in the news of late for various reasons, most notably athletes. Football players experiencing complications that could stem from multiple concussions are coming to the fore of conversation about sport safety. As many parents know, advocates suggest wearing helmets even when engaging in non-contact sports like cycling, skateboarding and skiing.

But what is a concussion? A concussion is simply described as a minor traumatic brain injury that occurs when the head strikes an object. The word stems from the Latin 'concutere' ("to shake violently"), or 'concussus' ("act of striking together"), Concussions most commonly result from falls, sports injuries and auto accidents.

At times a concussion causes loss of consciousness but not always. How long one is unconscious can signal the severity of the injury.

Other symptoms include:

- Seeing stars, all white, or all black
- Confused thinking, "spaciness"
- Headache
- Memory loss of events before or right after the injury
- Nausea
- Seeing flashing lights

The following emergency symptoms require immediate medical care and diagnostic testing (MRI, head CT scan, EEG, etc.):

- Changes in alertness and consciousness
- Muscle weakness on one or both sides
- Repeated vomiting
- Unequal pupils and / or unusual eye movements
- Convulsions or seizures
- Trouble walking

Many patients commonly experience mood changes, irritability, trouble concentrating, headaches and dizziness. Most of these go away slowly; you may want to get help from friends and family as you heal.

In severe cases, long-term problems can arise. Brain swelling is the most critical because it can be life-threatening and must be addressed right away. Most controversial is the incidence of long-term changes

to the brain, much of which is coming to light due to highly-publicized cases such as the death of Junior Seau, a football player who killed himself. Physicians opined that he had sustained multiple concussions over a long period of time which profoundly altered his brain function. In the last few days, pathologists have indeed found evidence of brain disease.

Other famous athletes, like Muhammed Ali, who've experienced long-term, repeated concussions, have experienced brain damage and neurological impairment. Boxing, rugby and even soccer have been known to negatively affect cognitive functioning and physical health even years after the concussive actions have occurred.

Patients commonly experience mood changes, irritability, trouble concentrating, headaches and dizziness. Most of these go away slowly; you may want to get help as you heal. Recovery may take weeks or even months so it's important to rest and monitor symptoms.

As always, make sure to protect your health and take precautions whenever necessary. Wear appropriate, protective clothing and helmets when playing sports. Always wear seat belts and make sure to use car seats for children. Keep an eye out for elderly or infirm neighbors or family, especially in icy conditions or when climbing stairs. At times a simple fall can have devastating consequences.

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