



## Sports Concussion – your silent, invisible opponent

“We are learning more everyday about concussions and the importance of recognizing subtle symptoms.”

**David Westerdahl, MD**, *Sports Medicine Specialist at Cleveland Clinic Florida*

As an athlete you live to play. No championships were won sitting on the sidelines. But every time you suit-up and step onto the playing field or court, you run the risk of suffering a concussion. All concussions are serious and their after-effects can last days to months. Prompt and proper treatment can decrease time missed from your sport. Concussion education is key in safe return to play. That’s why it’s important to help yourself, your team and your coach by making concussion awareness part of your pre-game checklist.

### What is a concussion?

A concussion is a short-lived brain injury caused by a bump, blow or jolt to the head. A variety of symptoms may develop and typically resolve over time. An athlete can suffer a concussion in any sport. Contact or collision sports, such as football, soccer, wrestling, ice hockey, lacrosse and rugby, have the highest incidence of concussion. Most concussions appear without loss of consciousness. Rarely is there a structural injury noted on MRI or CT scan. Even when the physical, and sometimes emotional, symptoms of a concussion have disappeared, the brain may not be healed.

Athletes who suffer a concussion are three to five times more likely to suffer a second concussion in the same season. Sustaining a repeat concussion, while recovering from a concussion, is dangerous. This is called second impact syndrome and can potentially cause brain swelling and brain damage. You can avoid further injury by not playing with a concussion.

### Know the symptoms of a concussion

Symptoms of a concussion can occur immediately, or hours after the initial “hit” or fall. If you experience any of the

following symptoms, tell your coach, a teammate, athletic trainer, team physician or parents. The sooner your injury is evaluated by a healthcare professional experienced in evaluating and treating concussion, the sooner you should be able to return to play.

### Symptoms:

- Headache
- Nausea
- Balance problems
- Double or blurry vision
- Sensitivity to light and noise
- Fatigue or drowsiness
- Changed sleep patterns
- Trouble comprehending and/or concentrating
- Difficulty paying attention
- Depression
- Irritability, nervousness or sadness
- Feeling “just not right” or in a “fog”

*\*\*It’s important to know that concussion symptoms can worsen with physical and mental activity, such as using your computer, gaming system or texting.*

### Additional risk factors include:

- Athletes with a history of previous brain impairment
- Younger athletes whose brains aren’t fully developed
- Recent or previous concussion
- Poorly fitting or improper equipment
- Poor technique
- Neglect of sports’ rules
- Genetic factors

### Evaluations and Management

If you suspect you or one of your teammates has sustained a concussion you should immediately alert your coaches and/or athletic trainer and seek immediate medical

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treatment from a healthcare professional experienced in evaluating for concussion. A medical professional should provide a neurological check, along with a mental status evaluation that typically includes orientation, concentration, balance, memory, reaction time and amnesia. Any athlete with symptoms of a concussion cannot return to play the same day.

### Returning to Play

After suffering a concussion, it's important to give your brain time to rest. Don't rush back into your daily activities, this includes both physical and mental rest. Athletes with a concussion may have trouble trying to study or concentrate playing video games or watching TV, texting, and doing any activity that increases heart rate.

There is no glory in "playing through the pain" when it comes to concussions. A concussion can affect both you and your team's performance. Symptoms typically worsen while playing with a concussion and delay your return to play.

You should not go back into any competition while you are still symptomatic. Get examined by a healthcare professional with experience with concussions to clear you for play. These professionals are trained to identify more subtle symptoms you may not even notice.

**"It's important to understand that concussions are brain injuries, not superficial or transient 'dings.' The full extent of these injuries is not always evident at the time they occur."**

**Evan Peck, MD, Sports Medicine Specialist at Cleveland Clinic Florida**

### Danger Signs or Severe Symptoms

Seek medical treatment immediately if you notice any of the following danger signs or severe symptoms in your athletes:

- One pupil larger than the other
- Is extremely drowsy and cannot be awakened
- Worsening headache
- Weakness, numbness or decreased coordination
- Repetitive nausea or vomiting
- Slurred speech
- Convulsions or seizures
- Cannot recognize people or places
- Becomes increasingly confused, restless or agitated
- Concerning or out-of-the-ordinary behavior
- Delayed or lack of consciousness

Other things to remember:

- Remove yourself from play
- Avoid anything that will put you at risk for another blow or jolt to the head.
- Ask your doctor when it's safe to drive a car or ride a bike.
- Take only medication that has been prescribed for you.
- Educate yourself and your teammates about the dangers of concussion and how to prevent them.

### Prevention

Although we know of nothing that can prevent a concussion, be smart and follow these guidelines:

- Use the proper sports and personal protective equipment. Equipment must be:
  - the right equipment for the game, position or activity
  - worn correctly and be the correct size and fit
  - used every time you play or practice
  - in good condition
- Follow the rules for safety and the rules of the sport.
- Practice good sportsmanship at all times.

Every time you walk onto the playing field, you're facing two opponents – the opposing team and a silent, invisible opponent, the very real threat of concussion. Honesty from the athlete and rest is key to a successful and full recovery.

Don't let yourself or your team down – keep your head in the game.

### THINK YOU MAY HAVE A SPORTS-RELATED CONCUSSION?

Cleveland Clinic Florida Sports Health offers comprehensive concussion evaluations and management from one experienced team.

To schedule a consultation with a concussion specialist, call **866.287.2963** or email **floridasports@ccf.org**.