

# A parent's guide to dealing with concussions

## Heads Up!



### Be Alert: Know that concussions are brain injuries

Concussions pose a significant injury risk to Canadians. They are often viewed as minor events that are tacitly accepted as part of sports. In reality, concussions are injuries to the brain that can have lasting effects. A group of world-renowned researchers recently defined concussion as a complex issue, in which one's brain is injured as the result of a direct force to the body, such as a blow to the head or elsewhere that causes a shaking or jarring to the brain<sup>1</sup>.

As a busy parent, you may not understand the full complexity of concussions – they are a tricky topic! It's easy to identify your child's bruise or scrape, but it's not always as simple to identify an injury inside the head. If your child has experienced a sudden blow or impact, some signs of concussion include: headache, nausea, difficulty concentrating and various emotional issues – a full list of symptoms is available on the Parachute website<sup>2</sup>. You

need to be alert to these symptoms – just as you would treat a sprained ankle, you also need to make sure you treat and respond to “sprained brains”!

Another way to be alert is to understand your role – parents are key influences on children's risk-taking patterns, particularly through the knowledge they have about their children's lives and experiences<sup>3,4,5</sup>. As a parent, you may wonder how you can help reduce your child's risk of concussion. First, be aware of the behaviours you display to your children as they are constantly looking to you for examples. In fact, research has demonstrated that parents' risk-taking behaviours are strong predictors of children's behaviours in the present and future<sup>6</sup>. Setting proper examples and encouraging safe practices will help ensure your children are learning and viewing the best ways to keep their most important body part safe and healthy!



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## Be Safe: Have the tools that help to prevent and identify concussions

Beyond being alert to the symptoms and being a good role model, parents can also find the tools and information to prevent, identify and manage concussions. These tools are available online and include:

- Pocket Concussion Recognition Tool<sup>7</sup>
- Hockey Canada's Concussion App<sup>8</sup>
- Things to Know About Concussions Tip Sheet<sup>2</sup>

Another important way to prevent concussions is ensuring that you teach children to respect the rules of sports and the players. As a parent, you should talk with your children about the meaning of good sportsmanship. One helpful example is the *Player Code of Conduct* form<sup>9</sup>, which was developed for hockey players but could be adapted for other activities.

Here are some common myths about concussions that might surprise you...

## Concussions: Myths and Facts

Myth	Fact
Helmets can protect against concussions	There is no helmet available to make your child concussion-proof
My child didn't get hit on the head, so there's no way he has a concussion	A hit does not have to be directly to the head in order to result in a concussion
As long as I keep my child out of sports until she's better, she can do anything else	Concussions require mental and physical rest, beyond avoiding the activity where the concussion occurred
As long as my child rests, it is not necessary to see a doctor	Concussions are injuries - they are best treated by someone with experience
If my child did not lose consciousness, he probably doesn't have a concussion	Concussions do not always include a loss of consciousness and symptoms can take time to emerge

## Be Aware: Know how to manage concussions

Even when following the rules of fair play, concussions can still happen. In the event that your child suffers a concussion, you need to be aware of how to best manage and treat this injury. First, it's always better to be safe than sorry – *when in doubt, sit them out*. It's better to miss a few games or classes and have a healed brain! Second, if you are unsure whether your child may have suffered a concussion or if they are healing properly, see a doctor – *when in doubt, check them out*.

Even if your child says they feel better, specific guidelines and recommendations outline how best to return to sports and education:

- Return to Play Guidelines<sup>10</sup>
- Return to school: information for teachers and parents<sup>11</sup>

Concussions are not always a one-time event: symptoms may reappear or get worse, and after the first concussion, a child may be more susceptible to a second and subsequent concussions. It is important to be aware that multiple concussions can add increased strain to your child. Repeated concussions should be taken seriously and activities may need to be altered or even permanently stopped. The advice of a physician is important to consider when making these decisions.

## References

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