



Sports Concussion - Be Aware and Be Prepared

What is a sports concussion?

A sports concussion is a mild traumatic brain injury (TBI) sustained while participating in an athletic activity. The concussion, or mild TBI, is caused by a blow or jolt to the head or body with such force that the brain is violently shaken within the skull. An athlete does not need to lose consciousness to sustain a concussion.

When is an athlete at risk?

Sports concussions can happen during any athletic activity, but are most prevalent in activities with a high risk of falls or collision with other athletes or equipment. Some of the high-risk activities include: football, basketball, baseball, field hockey, ice hockey, gymnastics, lacrosse, soccer, softball, volleyball, and wrestling.

Withholding an athlete from play who is suspected to have a concussion is vital. Sustaining a concussion weakens the brain and exposes it to greater risk for repeated, more severe, brain injury. If athletes continue to play following a possible concussion without seeking medical care, they are putting their health and athletic careers at risk. A more severe brain injury could result in months of rehabilitation and recovery and could mean the end of an athlete's career.

How to recognize a sports concussion:

One or more of these signs or symptoms should alert coaching staff and/or athletes that a possible concussion has occurred.

Signs observed by coaching staff	Symptoms reported by athlete
Appears dazed or stunned	Headache
Is confused by plays or assignments	Nausea
Forgets plays	Trouble balancing
Is unsure of game, score or opponent	Dizziness
Moves clumsily	Sensitivity to light or noise
Answers questions slowly	Feeling sluggish
Loses consciousness	Feeling foggy or groggy
Shows behavior or personality changes	Concentration or memory problems
Does not remember events prior to hit	Confusion
Does not remember events after hit	

What should be done if a sports concussion occurs?

Athletes and teams should always have an action plan created in the event of a possible concussion. Preparing in this manner will allow for the best detection, treatment, and prevention of sports concussions. Suggested steps for an action plan include:

Prevention and Preparation

- Educate athletes, coaches, and trainers about the risks and signs/symptoms of sports concussion.
- Keep athletic equipment in proper working order and monitor it for proper fit.
- Encourage athletes to take an active role in preventing and detecting concussion by reporting faulty equipment and any symptoms they are experiencing following a high-risk incident such as a hit or a fall.
- Teach athletes that it is not in the best interest of their health or athletic career to play injured. Insist that all concussion-like symptoms are to be taken seriously.
- Always have appropriate staff on hand for the assessment of injuries and to provide referrals for further medical care.
- Consider providing athletes with baseline testing of brain function before the season begins to allow for better detection of possible concussion throughout the season.

When a possible sports concussion occurs

- Immediately remove the athlete from play. Have proper medical staff conduct preliminary screening for concussion-like symptoms. When in doubt, keep the player out.
- An appropriate health care professional should evaluate and provide a diagnosis for the athlete.
- If the athlete is a minor, inform parents or guardians about a possible concussion. Make sure to insist the athlete follows up with a health care professional.
- Allow return to play only after a health care professional has given permission.

What are some roadblocks to prevention and treatment of sports concussion?

The main barriers to prevention and proper care of sports concussion are the possible victims themselves – the athletes. In the interest of acting tough and showing dedication to their team, many athletes try to “walk-off” concussion symptoms, putting themselves at risk for more severe injury.

To break through this age-old barrier, it is essential for coaching staff and parents of youth athletes to insist that safety comes first and that carelessness will not be rewarded. It is also important to encourage athletes to support each other in reporting symptoms – to make being part of a team mean looking out for each other’s well-being as well as the scoreboard.

With proper education and preparation, athletes and coaching staff can enjoy a more productive athletic season on all accounts. They can reduce the risk for injury, increase chance for a more timely recovery when injury occurs, and prevent serious injury that can wreak havoc on an athlete’s health and career.

For further information please contact the Brain Injury Association of Michigan at 810.229.5880 or by visiting www.biami.org.

*Information derived from the Centers for Disease Control’s research report, “Concussion in High School Sports Guide for Coaches” September, 2005.