

Head Injuries



Head injuries can be of two types:

- Those that involve the outside of the head, like a cut, scrape or lump
- Those that involve the skull and blood vessels within the skull or the brain, like a concussion or other brain injury

Whether the head injury is minor or serious, it can be scary when your child's head is hurt. Big lumps or bleeding can occur with even minor scalp injuries because there are a lot of blood vessels in the scalp. Most of the time, bleeding stops by itself with pressure held to the wound. The lump, or "goose egg," that sometimes results is bleeding beneath the skin.

After the scare of this kind of injury and bleeding, it is common for children to have a mild headache, mild dizziness and nausea. However, an internal injury to the brain is serious and may take time to develop. That's why children need to be watched closely for a delayed reaction to a head injury.

These tips will help you decide what to do after your child has a head injury.

Call 911 now if your child:

- Isn't breathing or has abnormal breathing.
- Was unconscious for more than one minute, or is hard to wake up or confused. If your child is unconscious, don't move them until the aid car arrives.
- Has a seizure.
- Is not moving their neck normally. Help your child keep still so their neck does not move.
- Has trouble seeing, talking or walking.
- Has extreme drowsiness.
- Has weakness of arms or legs.
- Has major bleeding that soaks through cloth and can't be stopped.

Call your child's doctor now if:

- Your child has a severe, long-lasting headache or crying
- Your child vomits two or more times the day of the injury
- The skin is split open and might need stitches
- There is a large dent or swelling larger than 1 inch on your child's head
- You can't stop the bleeding after applying pressure for 10 minutes
- Your child has neck pain
- Your child has blurred vision lasting more than five minutes

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- Watery fluid is dripping from your child's nose or ear when they are not crying
- Your child was confused, had trouble talking, had trouble walking or had weakness of arms or legs but is fine now
- The injury was caused by high speed (as in a car accident), a fall from two or more times your child's height or a blow from a hard object (such as a golf club)
- Your child was unconscious for less than one minute
- Your child can't remember what happened
- Your child is less than 1 year old
- You think your child has a serious injury

Watch your child

- Watch your child closely for the first two hours after a head injury. Have your child lie down and rest until the symptoms are gone.
- Your child can sleep if they want, but wake your child after two hours to check if they can talk clearly and walk, and if they act like normal.
- Check your child once when you go to bed and again four hours later. Do this for two nights. Make sure they can walk and talk clearly when you wake them. You may want to sleep in the same room with your child for the two nights.

Home care for a mild head injury:

- If there is a cut or scrape, wash it with soap and water.
- After the cut or scrape is cleaned, apply pressure with a clean cloth for 10 minutes to stop any bleeding.
- If there is swelling, put an ice pack over the area for 20 minutes at a time.
- Give your child only clear fluids for the first two hours. Give them their regular food and drink after two hours.
- Do not give your child pain medicine. If the headache is that bad, they need to be seen by a health-care provider.

How long will the symptoms last?

Most head injuries only cause a scalp injury. It may take one week for the swelling to go away. It may take two or three days for the headache at the injury site to go away. Call your child's doctor if the symptoms last longer or if you think your child needs to be seen.

When can my child return to sports after a concussion?

Do not let your child return to sports if they have a headache or dizziness after a head injury. It is best to ask your child's health-care provider when they can return to sports.

TO LEARN MORE

- Children's Resource Line (206) 987-2500 or (866) 987-2500 toll-free Washington, Alaska, Montana, Idaho
- Your Child's Health-Care Provider
- Children's Sports Concussion Handout at www.seattlechildrens.org – coming late 2008

Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Please call Marketing Communications at (206) 987-5205.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Children's Hospital. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's health-care provider.