



Playing it Safe

RAISING AWARENESS OF SAFETY ON THE PLAYING FIELD



How Do I Know if I Have a Concussion?

What is a Concussion?

Simply put, when you hit your head, your brain moves and can bang against the inside of your skull. This can cause your brain to bruise or lead to tearing of blood vessels and injury to the nerves resulting in a concussion – a temporary loss of normal brain function.

Concussions and other brain injuries are fairly common in athletes. According to a recent study, high school athletes in nine sports sustained an estimated 137,000 concussions during the 2007-2008 school year. High-impact sports such as football, boxing, lacrosse, soccer, basketball and hockey pose a higher risk of head injury, even with the use of protective headgear.

So you've hit your head – but do you have a concussion?

Here are some of the signs:

- "Seeing stars" and feeling dazed, dizzy, or lightheaded
- Nausea or vomiting
- Headaches
- Blurred vision, unevenly sized pupils and sensitivity to light
- Slurred speech or saying things that don't make sense
- Difficulty concentrating, thinking or making decisions
- Difficulty with coordination or balance
- Feeling anxious or irritable for no apparent reason
- Feeling overly tired
- Memory loss or forgetfulness (if you don't know your name – there's a good chance you have a concussion)

You don't have to lose consciousness to have a concussion.

The signs of a concussion are not always recognized, which is why having an athletic trainer who is specifically trained to recognize concussions or a medical professional trained in concussion management is essential. They can assess your injury and determine if you have a concussion. Often baseline testing – when players are tested for neurological responses prior to the season – can be helpful in evaluating if you have a concussion.

You Have a Concussion, Now What?

First, stop playing. Don't return to play even if you feel fine – your brain needs time to heal. The amount of time you need to recover depends on how long the symptoms last. Healthy teens can usually resume normal activities within a few weeks, but each situation is different.

Your athletic trainer and/or doctor will determine how long you should sit out. Until then, it's important to get plenty of rest for both your body and mind. Activities that require concentration and attention (like studying, test taking, or even playing video games) may make the symptoms worse and delay recovery.

Dangers of a Concussion:

Continuing to play or returning to activity too soon will put you at risk for serious injury – even if you feel fine. If your brain hasn't healed properly from a concussion and you get hit again (even if it's with less force), you can develop long-term disabilities or die.

Preventing Concussions

Some accidents can not be avoided, but you can do a lot to prevent a concussion by taking simple precautions:

- Wear appropriate headgear and safety equipment
- Learn appropriate techniques. In sports like football, learn how to tackle without leading with your head, and in soccer, avoid heading the ball when it is kicked at high velocity from close range

Remember, most people with concussions recover just fine with appropriate treatment. But it's important to take proper steps if you suspect a concussion.



Who is an Athletic Trainer?

Not Just Ankle Tapers, Athletic Trainers Are Healthcare Professionals

Athletic trainers are physical medicine specialists, who make clinical decisions regarding injury prevention, rehabilitation and most importantly, provide recognition of and on-site emergency care for catastrophic injuries, such as sudden cardiac arrest, heat illness and concussions.

Recognized as allied health professionals by the American Medical Association (AMA), athletic trainers have earned a minimum of a bachelor's degree from an accredited university, completed appropriate clinical training and are certified nationally by the Board of Certification.