**Discharge Instructions for Your Child’s Concussion**

Your child was seen today for a concussion. Use this handout to watch for changes in how your child is feeling or acting and to help your child feel better.

**What is a Concussion?**

A concussion is a type of traumatic brain injury from a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body that causes:

* The head and brain to move quickly back and forth.
* The brain to bounce or twist in the skull from this sudden movement.
* Chemical changes in the brain and sometimes stretches and damages the brain cells.

**How will my child feel?**

Concussion symptoms may appear during the normal healing process and will generally improve over time. Most people with a concussion feel better within a couple of weeks. Some symptoms may appear right away, while other symptoms may not appear for hours or days after the injury. Your child may not realize they have some symptoms until they try to do their usual activities. You may notice changes before your child does. If there are any symptoms that concern you or are getting worse, be sure to talk with your doctor or nurse.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Here are symptoms your child may have:** | | | |
| THINKING/REMEMBERING | Difficulty thinking clearly | Feeling slowed down | Difficulty concentrating | Difficulty remembering new information |
| PHYSICAL | Headache  Fuzzy or blurry vision | Nausea/vomiting (early on)  Dizziness | Sensitivity to noise or light  Balance problems | Feeling tired, having no energy |
| EMOTIONAL/MOOD | Irritability | Sadness | More emotional | Nervousness or anxiety |
| SLEEP | Sleeping more than usual | Sleeping less than usual | Trouble falling asleep |  |

**What Steps Should My Child Take to Feel Better?**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1. REST   Your child should take it easy the first few days after the injury when symptoms are more severe. | * Early on, limit physical and thinking/remembering activities to avoid symptoms getting worse. * Avoid activities that put your child at risk for another injury to the head and brain. * Get a good night’s sleep and take naps during the day as needed. |
| 1. LIGHT ACTIVITY   As your child starts to feel better, gradually return to regular (non-strenuous) activities. | * Find relaxing activities at home. Avoid activities that put your child at risk for another injury to the head and brain. * Return to school gradually. If symptoms do not worsen during an activity, then this activity is OK for your child. If symptoms worsen, cut back on that activity until it is tolerated. * Get maximum nighttime sleep. (Avoid screen time and loud music before bed, sleep in a dark room, and keep to a fixed bedtime and wake up schedule.) * Reduce daytime naps or return to a regular daytime nap schedule (as appropriate for their age). |
| MODERATE ACTIVITY  When symptoms are mild and nearly gone, your child can return to most regular activities. | Help your child take breaks only if concussion symptoms worsen.  Return to a regular school schedule. |
| BACK TO REGULAR ACTIVITY  Recovery from a concussion is when your child is able to do all of their regular activities without experiencing any symptoms. | |

* Ask your child’s doctor or nurse about safe over-the-counter or prescription medications to help with symptoms (e.g., Ibuprofen or acetaminophen for headache).
* **Schedule a follow up appointment with your child’s regular doctor or nurse.**

Limit the number of soft drinks or caffeinated items to help your child rest.

**When Can My Child Return to School?**

Your child may need to take a short time off from school (or work, if relevant). Ask the doctor or nurse for written instructions about when your child can safely return to school, sports, work and other activities, such as riding a bike or driving a car.

For a short time after a concussion, your child may need support, such as:

* Rest breaks
* Fewer hours at school or work
* More time to take tests or complete tasks
* Less time spent reading, writing, on the computer, or watching TV

If your child is having a difficult recovery, talk with their school or their employer about support services that may be available. For most people, only short-term changes or support services are needed as they recover from a concussion. Formal support services may be available to help people who are having a longer or more difficult recovery. If symptoms persist, talk with their doctor or nurse about formal support services they recommend. If the injury was work-related, make sure your child reports it right away to their employer and their workers’ compensation office.

**What If I Don't Feel Like My Child is Getting Better?**

If you do not feel like your child is getting better, talk with their doctor or nurse. Keep track of your child’s concussion symptoms and share them with the doctor or nurse. This may help their doctor or nurse identify the best treatments for your child’s symptoms. You may also need to take your child to see a specialist in treating brain injuries. Ask your child’s doctor or nurse for names of brain injury specialists in your area.

**When Can My Child Return to Sports and Recreational Activities?**

Your child should **not** return to sports and recreational activities:

* On the same day of the injury

AND

* Until they get the OK from a doctor with experience evaluating concussion.

While rare, teens are at greater risk of suffering a severe brain injury when a repeat concussion occurs before the brain has fully healed. It can even be fatal.

Getting approval from a doctor to return to play is important since Playing with a concussion may slow recovery. A repeat concussion that occurs before the brain has fully healed can increase the chance for long-term problems.

Your child’s doctor or nurse should carefully manage and monitor the process of returning to sports and activities. If possible, your child’s certified athletic trainer should be involved.

**Signs of a More Serious Brain Injury**

**Call 9-1-1** if your child has:

* A headache that gets worse and does not go away
* Significant nausea or repeated vomiting
* Unusual behavior, increased confusion, restlessness, or agitation
* Drowsiness or inability to wake up
* Slurred speech, weakness, numbness, or decreased coordination
* Convulsions or seizures (shaking or twitching)
* Loss of consciousness (passing out)

**Where Can I Learn More about Concussion?**

More information on concussion, tips to help your child feel better, information about returning to school, the 5-step process to return to play can be found at: [www.cdc.gov/HEADSUP](http://www.cdc.gov/HEADSUP).

*The information provided in this handout or through linkages to other sites is not a substitute for medical or professional care. Questions about diagnosis and treatment for concussion should be directed to your child’s doctor or other healthcare provider.*