When does a bump on the head require medical attention?

This is a question every parent asks themselves at one time or another. Toddlers take tumbles when they’re learning to walk. Young children have mishaps off the ends of furniture because they have no fear. And, once kids are in sports, it brings about a whole new set of opportunities for injuries.

Regardless of age, concussions, or traumatic brain injuries resulting from a blow to the head, should be taken seriously. And, they don’t always require a blow to the head. You can have a concussion when the head and upper body are violently shaken.

Signs of a concussion are temporary loss of consciousness, headache, dizziness, ringing in the ears, nausea and vomiting. As scary as each of these are, what happens if the concussion is left untreated?

This is the question that has come to the forefront in light of the NFL losing three players in the last 18 months to suicide and the cause of death has been directly linked to concussions. Right now, there are over 110 pending lawsuits which allege that the NFL has failed to treat concussions when they occur, giving the players long lasting and life-threatening side effects.

A concussion, left untreated, can cause concentration and memory issues, irritability, sensitivity to light and sound, disorders of taste and smell, sleep disturbances and depression. Further, a person suffering from a concussion increases their risk of developing epilepsy within the first five years after the injury.

So, what should you do if you suspect that you or a loved one has a concussion? Even if an emergency room visit is not required, a medical examination should occur within the first day or two. Rigorous physical activity should cease until cleared by a physician. Also, activities that require concentration, such as computer work, texting and playing video games, should be kept to a minimum as they place stressors on the brain.

Is it safe to take anything for the pain? According to the Mayo Clinic’s website, “If you have a headache, take acetaminophen (Tylenol, others) to ease pain. Avoid taking other pain relievers such as aspirin or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, others) if you suspect you have a concussion. It’s possible that these may increase the risk of bleeding.”

Of course, the best thing you can do is take precautions against concussions. This involves wearing protective head gear while engaged in sports and physical activities and wearing a seat belt in case of an auto accident. Keep your home free of clutter to avoid trip and falls and clean up any spills that make floors slippery.

Stay safe. Stay alive.

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