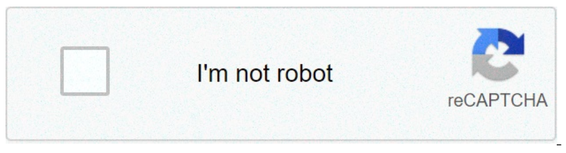

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Permanent brain damage from concussion

Table of Contents A traumatic brain injury (TBI) is any sudden injury to your brain. It happens when a bump, blow, jolt, or other injury damages the brain. It can occur from a strong or violent strike to your head. TBIs can be mild, moderate, or severe, depending on how much damage there is. Concussions are a mild form of TBI. Mild forms cause temporary symptoms that usually go away a few days or weeks after the injury. The most severe TBIs can cause permanent brain damage, coma, or death. Some symptoms of a traumatic brain injury happen immediately after the traumatic event. Others may not appear for several days or weeks. For a mild injury, it's normal to feel dizzy, nauseated, or have a headache. Other mild symptoms include: Ringing in your ears Neck pain Blurry vision Confusion Slow reflexes Brief loss of consciousness These mild symptoms usually go away after a few days or weeks. In addition to these symptoms, moderate or severe TBIs may include: Lasting nausea or vomiting Lasting headache Dilated (larger than normal) pupils Trouble waking up, walking, or speaking Slurred speech Weakness or numbness in your arms or legs Drainage of bloody or clear fluids from your ears or nose Seizures These types of TBIs are serious and can have lasting effects. Your mood can change, making you feel angry, anxious, or sensitive. Short-term memory can be affected, as well as your ability to think and focus. You may have trouble controlling your impulses. Always seek medical care if you have hit your head. If your symptoms are severe, call 911 or go to the emergency room. Contact a doctor if someone you know has a head injury and acts strange. There are many things that can cause a traumatic brain injury. Many TBIs occur in motor vehicle accidents. Others can happen as a result of: Falls Assaults Sports or recreation injuries (especially high-contact sports like football, boxing, and mixed martial arts) Gunshot wounds Child abuse, including shaken baby syndrome Military actions (blast injuries) There are different types of injuries that can happen to the brain. A concussion occurs from a hard fall or hit to the head. It jars your brain and causes shock or trauma. Most of the time you don't lose consciousness. You may feel dazed and off-balance. You also may have brief decreased vision or memory. A brain contusion is a bruise of the brain. It causes bleeding in your brain and swelling. This type of bruise is on your brain and not visible on your skin. A skull fracture is when the skull cracks. If this happens, broken bones can cut into your brain and cause bleeding or other damage. An intracranial hematoma is bleeding inside the skull that collects and clots. A mass of clotted blood forms between your brain and skull. It may not show up for a few days, or even weeks, after an injury. Your doctor will perform a neurological exam. He or she will ask you questions about the injury and symptoms. They also will test your physical and mental reflexes. The exam helps your doctor determine how severe your brain injury is. You may need other tests, such as an X-ray, computerized tomography (CT) scan, or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). These tests take pictures of your head and brain. They show if there is a skull fracture or bleeding, bruising, or blood clots in your brain. There are some things you can do to lower the risk for a TBI. You should: Always wear a seatbelt in the car. Never drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Wear a helmet in sports and activities, like biking, skating, horse riding, skiing, and snowboarding. Avoid dangerous sports and activities. Use child car seats correctly. Always buckle your young child into a car seat before you drive. Make living areas safe for children. Install window guards to keep children from falling out of windows. Use safety gates at the top and bottom of stairs. Make sure the surface of playgrounds where your kids play is made of shock-absorbing material, such as mulch or sand. Make living areas safe for seniors. Remove tripping hazards, use nonslip mats in showers and bathtubs, and install handrails and grab bars on stairs or in the bathroom. Traumatic brain injury is an emergency situation. Treatment depends on the type, location, and severity of the injury. If you have a mild injury, treatment will consist mainly of rest. You can also take over-the-counter pain medicine can help relieve headaches or neck pain. You should be watched closely at home for any new or worsening symptoms. You may go back to see the doctor for a check-up. If you have a moderate or severe injury, your doctor will start by stabilizing your injury. This involves getting oxygen to your brain and body, maintaining blood flow, and managing blood pressure. These precautions help prevent further damage. You may receive medicines in the hospital or you could need surgery. A surgeon can repair a skull fracture, stop bleeding in the brain, remove blood clots, or relieve pressure inside the skull. Surgery may be needed immediately. Sometimes blood clots take time to form, and surgery is needed days or weeks after the injury. Many people with moderate to severe TBI need rehabilitation. The type of rehab you need will depend on many factors, including how severe the injury was and what part of the brain it affected. For example, if the injury affected the part of your brain involved with speech, you may need speech therapy. Or, if it affected the area of the brain that controls movement, you may need physical therapy. Your rehab may take place in the hospital, in a skilled nursing facility, in an outpatient clinic, or at home. It usually involves many specialists. The goal of any therapy or rehabilitation is to improve your ability to perform daily activities. Some traumatic brain injuries have lasting effects. You may be left with disabilities. These can be physical, behavioral, communicative, and/or mental. Customized treatment helps you to have as full and normal a life as possible. If you have lasting effects from your injury, you might find it helpful to find a support group. There, others who have experienced similar injuries can help you learn about issues related to your injury, teach you coping strategies, and offer emotional support. Ask your doctor or rehabilitation therapist if there are any support groups near you. Could I have a traumatic brain injury and not know it? Will my symptoms show up weeks later? For a mild traumatic brain injury, how long before I can return to my daily routine? Does a traumatic brain injury cause permanent brain damage? Can you recommend a support group for people who have traumatic brain injuries? Copyright © American Academy of Family Physicians This information provides a general overview and may not apply to everyone. Talk to your family doctor to find out if this information applies to you and to get more information on this subject. Photo credit: Background photo created by freepik – www.freepik.com According to the Brain Injury Research Institute, 1.5 million Americans suffer from traumatic brain injuries, with a brain injury occurring every 15 seconds. Concussions make up a large percentage of these cases, making it the most common form of brain injury. With such a large number of people affected by concussions, it is important to know the long-term effects associated with this brain injury. Regardless of how a concussion occurs or how severe it is perceived to be, it is important to seek immediate medical attention to reduce the risk of long-term effects. How Do Concussions Happen? Simply put, a concussion occurs due to a traumatic blow to the head that causes both the head and brain to be shaken back and forth in a whiplash-like fashion. This causes the brain to be bounced around within the skull, damaging the brain's inner structure. The brain's functions are affected due to physical and chemical changes brought on by the damage. So what are some of the most common causes and risk factors of a concussion? Sports-Related Injuries A significant number of concussions occur due to sports-related injuries. According to the CDC, there are somewhere between 1.6 and 3.8 million sports and recreation-related concussions occurring each year in the United States. While people of all ages participate in sports, adolescents are at a much higher risk for concussions due to the fact that their brains are still developing. Contact sports such as football, basketball, and soccer are known to be the sports most commonly associated with concussions. Falling In 2014, falls were the leading cause of traumatic brain injuries, with 48% of all traumatic brain injury emergency room visits occurring that year as a result of a fall. Of concussions caused by a fall, young children and older adults are the most commonly affected. Motor Vehicle Collisions In regards to those between the ages of 15 and 24, studies report that motor vehicle collisions are the most common cause of concussions. While many people who find themselves involved in a motor vehicle collision may assume they are okay because they haven't lost consciousness, this isn't always the case. In fact, many people who suffer from concussions don't lose consciousness at all. This highlights the importance of seeking medical treatment after a car accident. How Can a Concussion Affect You Long-Term? Many of the more recognizable symptoms associated with a concussion develop in a relatively short period of time. These include trouble concentrating, memory problems, and sensitivity to light or noise. Unfortunately, there are a number of long-term effects associated with a concussion. While fairly rare, there are two factors in particular that make your chances of experiencing long-term effects from a concussion more likely. These include neglecting to treat a concussion or getting a series of concussions over time. Post-Concussion Syndrome While the symptoms of a concussion should resolve within one to six weeks on average, some people suffer from symptoms for much longer. Post-concussion syndrome is defined as a complex disorder where a variety of symptoms persist for weeks, or even months after a concussion occurs. While you may be quick to assume that post-concussion syndrome is primarily associated with severe concussions, this isn't necessarily true. Medical professionals suggest that the severity of a concussion has no impact on whether or not post-concussion syndrome will be experienced. Let's take a look at the symptoms experienced by those suffering from post-concussion syndrome: Headaches Disorientation Fatigue Ringing in the ears Increased irritability Anxiety Insomnia Loss of concentration and memory Blurry vision Sensitivity to noise and light Decreases in taste and smell (rare) When it comes to post-concussion syndrome, unfortunately researchers have yet to determine why some people with concussions develop persistent long-term symptoms while others do not. Some experts suggest that post-concussion symptoms develop due to more psychological factors. This is because many of the common symptoms mirror those associated with anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Long-Term Effects Lasting Decades In 2013, research presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science suggested that brain damage caused by a concussion can last for decades after the original injury. This research highlighted the fact that injuries with no visible abnormalities on MRI or CT scans can cause debilitating symptoms as the years go on. Citing many instances of people suffering from the long-term effects of a concussion, including athletes and soldiers, the research went on to detail the symptoms. These included learning, memory, judgment, and emotional impairments. Each of these symptoms makes daily life more difficult for sufferers, whether in a sense of interpersonal relationships or work performance. Avoiding the Long-Term Effects of a Concussion Considering that one of the biggest risk factors for developing long-term symptoms after a concussion is suffering from multiple concussions, it is important to allow your brain time to heal. According to Jeffrey English, M.D., a neurologist at Piedmont Healthcare, 80% to 85% of those suffering from a concussion (with the exception of professional athletes) recover within two to three weeks with no known long-term health consequences. Dr. English goes on to state that there is evidence that sustaining a brain injury when you haven't fully recovered from a concussion can have long-term consequences. It is for this reason that healthcare professionals require patients to abstain from normal physical activity until they meet certain requirements. Dr. English urges those who have suffered from a concussion to first complete a five-step progressive physical exertion plan with their physician before returning to regular activity. He also recommends that coaches, players, and parents keep an eye out for symptoms of concussion as a preventative measure against long-term effects in young athletes. Finally, if you or someone you know is suspected of a concussion, don't wait to seek medical attention. Regardless of whether or not you exhibit some of the most common signs of a concussion, it is important to get checked out after taking a hit to the head. Concussive symptoms can sometimes be elusive depending on the individual, so it is important to meet with a physician. A concussion is a type of traumatic brain injury caused by a rapid acceleration of the brain. Concussions are often the result of a direct hit to the head but can also result from any blow to neck, face, or body that places a rotational force on the brain. The symptoms, which include headaches and trouble with concentration, memory, and balance, are usually temporary. You've probably heard about athletes having a concussion and needing to sit out a game or even the rest of the season. But concussions happen to plenty of non-athletes, too. In fact, millions of children have a concussion each year. Most children recover completely within several weeks. How worried should parents be about concussions? If you think your child may have suffered a concussion, it's important to seek treatment right away. Even if the injury or symptoms seem minor, they need to be checked by a doctor. Most concussions don't cause a loss of consciousness. In some cases, a child who seems fine at first will develop symptoms later. If your child has any of the following symptoms, seek emergency care right away: blood or fluid coming out of their nose or ears symptoms of a seizure lost consciousness (passing out) worsening headaches repeated vomiting trouble breathing trouble walking or standing a change in pupil size (one is bigger than the other, or both are unusually large) slurring words or trouble speaking noticeable bruising or a large bump anywhere on the head Most kids, if their concussions are managed properly and they avoid risky situations until they've fully recovered, will be fine. Typically, children fully recover from sports-related concussions within 10 days. Most regain normal brain function and do just as well in school and at sports as before. However, some patients take months to recover completely. Children who get a second concussion before fully recovering from the first are at risk for serious, long-term problems. What are the long-term problems of a concussion? The most common long-term problem is delayed or incomplete recovery. This can happen after multiple concussions, or when a child has another concussion before fully recovering from a previous one. In some cases, repeated concussions can cause massive brain swelling and permanent brain damage. Such cases are extremely rare, however. Recently, something called chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) has been described in pro athletes, like wrestlers and football players. After multiple concussions, they went on to have serious depression and struggle with memory and basic activities of daily living. Boston Children's Hospital is leading a five-year study of former NFL football players that aims to shed light on the long-term neurological health of these players. We believe, this study will help us develop better treatment and prevention methods for athletes of all ages. Who is at the greatest risk for long-term problems after a concussion? People who have already sustained a concussion are at greater risk for subsequent concussions. The effects are likely to accumulate, in other words, each concussion causes more severe symptoms and requires longer recovery times. If your child has just one concussion, you probably won't see a change in their physical or intellectual abilities. If they have multiple concussions, the risk for long-term changes increases. Every child is different, however, and there is no way to know when any given child will experience long-term effects. Some children have five or six concussions with no measurable long-term change in their abilities.

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