

Sports Related Concussion Facts

Each year in the United States, more than 100,000 people suffer concussions while playing sports. Concussions can occur in various sports and can affect all athletes from kids to professional players. Awareness of sports concussions has increased as it has been shown to be a significant problem in the sports world. Research has recently made headlines regarding the long term effects of concussions and the consequences of returning to the game too soon.

Concussions are actually mild traumatic brain injuries and being able to recognize the signs of a concussion and provide proper treatment is imperative, especially for younger athletes. Despite research, it is still unclear whether any type of brain damage is sustained when someone experiences a concussion. In general, imaging tests do not typically detect brain damage in concussion patients however it is known that a concussion does cause a temporary impairment of how the brain functions and processes information. People that suffer from concussions normally recover in a week to ten days but once an athlete has sustained one concussion, they are at a higher risk for additional concussions.

Concussion Causes and Symptoms

A concussion occurs when some type of force causes the brain to move back and forth rapidly inside of the skull. The force can be caused by a direct hit to the head or by a hit to the body that causes the head to quickly rotate. While concussions can occur in all sports, they are more prevalent in sports such as football, soccer, and hockey. The symptoms of a concussion are not always visible. Contrary to popular belief, a person does not need to be rendered unconscious to suffer a concussion. Concussions can cause a number of symptoms which can begin to appear immediately or may be delayed for several days. The most common symptoms of a concussion include headache, drowsiness, memory loss, loss of consciousness, confusion, and dizziness or problems with balance. Symptoms also include irritability, depression, nausea and vomiting, confusion, and difficulty communicating or speaking.

Treating a Concussion

Anyone suspected of suffering a concussion should be evaluated by a doctor. The doctor will inquire about the injury and will ask what symptoms a person may be experiencing. Doctors will normally perform a neurological exam which tests for vision, balance, hearing, coordination, and reflexes. It is important to tell a doctor about any previous concussions. Currently, there is not much that can be done to treat a concussion and the best way to heal is complete rest. People with a concussion should not only rest physically but should refrain from reading, watching television, and other activities as mental rest is also important. Most concussion symptoms will resolve within a week to 10 days however some people can have symptoms for a longer period of time. Once symptoms have subsided, it is important to gradually return to daily activities as a person may not have fully healed yet. Doctors will normally recommend a safe time frame for returning to normal activities such as work, school, and sports.

If a person suffers a concussion and begins playing sports again too soon, they are at risk for another concussion. Repeat concussions have proven to take much longer to heal and can result in long term

health effects such as chronic headaches. Though rare, repeat concussions can cause permanent brain damage.

Preventing Concussions

While the risk of concussions cannot be completely eliminated, using and wearing proper equipment can decrease the risk. Athletes should also be adequately trained on how to safely play their sport and follow rules that are put in place to keep them safe (a sports safety book might be beneficial). Athletes should also understand how serious a concussion can be. Often, players will try to downplay any symptoms they have so they can get back in the game. Awareness of the effects of suffering a concussion is becoming more and more important.

Research into concussions is ongoing as is research into sports related concussions. As scientists learn more, it will allow for rules to be put into place and equipment adjusted to provide players with a safer experience. Concussion awareness and prevention is an important part of being involved in sports.