

Concussions in Youth Sports – Part 1

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A concussion can occur in any organized or unorganized sport; however, they are most commonly associated with contact-collision sports such as football, hockey, soccer and basketball. It is estimated that over 3 million sports and recreational-related concussions occur in the United

States each year. The American Academy of Neurology defines a concussion as, “any alteration of mental function following a blow to the head that may or may not involve a loss of consciousness.” Athletes sustain all kinds of contact blows throughout a practice or game to their body. However, a direct blow to the head, face, neck or elsewhere on the body with an impulsive force transmitted to the head is a main cause for a concussion injury. The signs and symptoms of a concussion are critical to the evaluation and treatment of an athlete who may have a concussion.

These signs and symptoms of a concussion can be subtle and they may not appear right away. Symptoms can last for hours, days and in some cases weeks or longer. Each concussion is unique to the person who has one and there is no exact time table one can follow for returning to play after a concussion. The following is a list of possible signs and symptoms of a concussion:

Immediate Signs and Symptoms: confusion, amnesia, headache, loss of consciousness, ringing in the ears, drowsiness, nausea, vomiting, unequal pupil size, convulsions, unusual eye movements, and slurred speech.

Delayed Signs and Symptoms: headaches, irritability, depression, sleep disturbances including insomnia or difficulty waking, fatigue, poor concentration, trouble with memory, getting lost or becoming easily confused, increased sensitivity to sounds, lights and distractions, loss of sense of taste or smell, and difficulty with gait or coordination of arms and legs.

It is important to recognize that the reporting of concussion symptoms may not always be reliable or accurate from an athlete. This is primarily due to the fact their desire to play outweighs the value of an honest response. It is also because athletes are taught to be tough and not to complain about every bump or bruise. Any athlete with a suspected concussion should be monitored closely and evaluated by a medical professional as soon as possible.

Allowing enough healing and recovery time after a concussion is critical in the prevention of any further damage or complications. Current research shows the effects of multiple concussions in athletes can be cumulative. Most athletes who have had one concussion can recover completely as long as they don't return to contact sports too soon. After suffering from a concussion there is a period of change in brain function that is variable in severity and length with each individual. Throughout this

period, the brain is more susceptible to another concussion and the risk of a more serious brain injury increases. A progressive concussion treatment plan is necessary to ensure the safest return to participation for all athletes. The important steps to such a treatment plan will be discussed in Part 2 of this article which will appear in the November 17th edition of the Argus Leader Sports Section or to view it immediately, go to www.sanfordorthosports.com, click on Patient Info.

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