

Caring for your child after a Head Injury

YOUR CHILD HAS A HEAD INJURY. It is safe to go home at present. When a child suffers a head injury, usually things are fine and there are no long-term complications. However, very occasionally the child's brain has suffered more of a shake than was obvious to start with. This leaflet will help you care for your child and recognise and deal with problems should they develop.

The first 24 hours following a head injury is when most serious complications can occur, so it is important that an adult stays with your child to make sure that your child is okay during this time

Warning signs

You should seek medical help (either go to hospital or call 111 for an ambulance) if your child has any of these warning signs in the first 24 hours after the injury:

- Is hard to wake (at night) or will not stay awake (during the day time)
- Will not drink or 'feed' (if a baby or infant)
- Goes suddenly "out cold"(unconscious) or "passes out".
- Repeatedly vomit's (throws up)
- Seems to be confused or behaves strangely
- Is very grumpy or irritable
- Doesn't seem to recognise you
- Has 'fit' or seizures (repeated jerking movements of the arms, legs or face, even if they have epilepsy)
- Slurs their speech
- Has become cross-eyed or their eyes are doing funny things
- Becomes weaker or more unsteady
- Complains of worsening headache
- Cries more than usual, or has a high pitched cry, and will not settle down
- Doesn't seem well to you

Head injuries are common, but very few are associated with brain injuries. Concussion is a minor brain injury that is similar to bruising on other parts of the body. Symptoms of mild concussion usually last for seven-10 days.

Your child should start to feel better in three or four days after the injury. See your family doctor if your child is still having problems after two weeks.

Common symptoms in children that don't need to worry you

For a few days after a head injury it is normal for a child to:

- Feel a little unsteady or giddy
- Not feel like playing with one thing for long or doing school work or homework
- Be a little grumpy
- Seem to need more sleep than usual
- Complain of a bit of a headache
- Dislike loud noises

All these things should normally get better as each day passes.

Caring for your child's head injury

Sleep After a head injury your child might want to sleep more than usual. This is normal. Your child should rest when they feel tired. Watching television and/or computer screen is not the best form of rest to recover from a head injury.

Pain Relief Pain relief like paracetamol (eg. Panadol, Panafen, or Pamol) is perfectly safe for their headache. Check with your doctor about other medications your child may be on or need.

Play Your child may not want to focus on one thing (like a game or schoolwork) for the first few days after the injury. This is normal. Your child must avoid rough play for at least two days following the injury. For at least three weeks following the injury your child should avoid rough sports and any other activities that could lead them to hit their head.

School or childcare Your child should have one or two days off crèche, day-care, preschool or school, following their head injury. When your child returns to school, tell the teachers/caregivers about the injury.