

Caring for yourself after a Head Injury

YOU HAVE A HEAD INJURY. It is safe for you to go home at present. The following information will help you take care of your head injury, and help you and your family/whanau and/or caregivers 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 you to make sure that you are okay during this time

Warning signs

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

- *Is very sleepy or difficult to wake*
- *Is confused or doesn't recognise you*
- *Has 'fit' or seizures (repeated jerking movements of the arms, legs or face, even if they have epilepsy)*
- *Slurs their speech*
- *Has blurred vision bad enough to stop them from seeing properly*
- *Is increasingly irritated or restless*
- *Repeatedly vomits*

Caring for your head injury in the first 24 hours after your injury:

- Rest as much as possible. Sleep is good but your caregiver should wake you up every 2 hours
- Avoid alcohol and illegal drugs
- Take your normal prescribed medications
- Take paracetamol (eg. Panadol, Panafen or Pamol) if necessary
- Don't drive a motor vehicle or climb ladders
- Avoid strenuous activity

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.

Common symptoms of mild concussion

- Headache
- Feeling tired or dizzy
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty with memory
- Moodiness, short temper or irritability

Caring for yourself after your head injury

Sleep and Rest Rest if you feel tired, but do not spend the whole day in bed.

Watching television and/or a computer screen is not the best form of rest to recover from a head injury.

Alcohol and Drugs Do not drink alcohol or take illegal drugs in the first 48 hours following a head injury. Because alcohol or drugs can hide problems that may develop, wait until you feel better before drinking or taking recreational drugs.

Driving Do not drive a vehicle for at least 24 hours following an injury. Wait until you are feeling better before driving.

Medication It is safe to take paracetamol to control your pain. Do not take sleeping pills unless advised so. Follow doctor's advice about what medication to take

Sport For at least three weeks following your injury you should avoid rough sports and any activities that could lead you to hit your head. Talk to your coach before returning to organised sports.

Work A head injury may affect your ability to carry out tasks in your job or could pose a safety risk. Talk to doctor and employer about how you are going to cope at work.

You should start to feel better in three or four days after your injury. See your family doctor if you are still having problems after two weeks.