

Sports-Related CONCUSSIONS

Benched with a blow to the head?
Doctors say rest, recover and then
get back in the game

By Marie Wolf

It's springtime and thousands of Long Island kids, from Pee Wee Little Leaguers and soccer squirts to brawny high school lacrosse players are deep in the throes of a competitive season of contact sports. Unfortunately, that puts them all at risk for injury—especially to the head.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that hospital emergency rooms treat about 135,000 children, ages five to 18 for sports-and-recreation related traumatic brain injury (TBI) including concussions, each year. "Compared with adults, younger persons are at increased risk for TBIs with increased severity and prolonged recovery," the CDC reports. That said, parents and coaches should be mindful of what to do if concussion is suspected.

THE FACTS

A concussion is a mild form of traumatic brain injury (TBI). A bump or blow to the head can cause one. A blow to the

body that causes rapid movement of the head can cause a concussion too, says Donald Krieff, M.D., a neurosurgeon who practices at Neurological Surgery, P.C. It's not always easy to recognize, because you can have a concussion even if you don't lose consciousness. Therefore, "a suspected concussion should never be ignored," he says.

THE SIGNS

A person may seem dazed, answer questions slowly and forget events prior to or after the hit or fall. "If a player has some type of transient response to a blow to the head [during a sporting event]—the child may be walking differently or not understanding a play, the coach should take him out of the game and have him evaluated by someone who is educated in concussions," says Dr. Robert Duarte, a neurologist and director of the Pain Center at the North Shore-LIJ Cushing Neuroscience Institute who also works with the Health System's Sports Concussion

Management program. There, a team of physicians assess and treat high school athletes who have sustained concussions.

Head for the emergency room "anytime a patient has loss of consciousness," says Dr. Rick Madhok, chief of neurosurgery at Nassau University Medical Center. Also, watch for weakness, persistent numbness or tingling in the body, he says.

BACK IN THE GAME

"The first goal? Symptoms must resolve," says Madhok. The patient needs complete physical and cognitive rest. After a few days without any symptoms, "gradually reintroduce short, non-intensive activity." If symptoms redevelop, take a step back. "This is where people need to listen to their bodies."

As for parents and coaches, Duarte warns, "kids only have one brain. They may recover from one concussion, but multiple concussions can cause cognitive impairment down the road. "You can't get a brain replacement."



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