Concussions: What Parents Should Know

How do you know if your child has experienced a concussion?

Medical literature states the term concussion really means “mild traumatic brain injury”. It’s important to think of it that way because although concussions may be commonplace in the sports arena, any injury to the brain should not be taken lightly. The clinical appearances of a concussion are confusion and amnesia which may be obvious immediately or appear several minutes later. If your child suffers a blow to the head, watch for any of the following signs:

- Vacant stare
- Delayed answers to questions
- Easily distracted
- Disorientation to time and place
- Slurred speech
- Emotionally out of proportion to circumstances
- Memory deficits
- Loss of consciousness
- Headache
- Vomiting

Can doctors see signs of concussion on a brain scan?

People with concussion usually have normal brain scans.

Why is it important to rest the brain after a concussion?

People with concussions typically make a full recovery. However, it is important to give your brain some rest because the brain is especially vulnerable to damage from even minor jolts while it is still recovering. In children, the consequences of not resting can be devastating because of a rare complication called “second impact syndrome”. The term “second impact syndrome” refers to brain swelling which occurs when a person suffers a second concussion while they are still symptomatic from the first one.

Since we can’t take concussions out of sports, how do we keep kids’ brains safe?

In most places, bicycle and motorcycle helmets are required by law because they reduce the severity of accident-related head injuries. When riding in the car, always remember to buckle up. For contact sports, use sport specific helmets. Still, helmets aren’t the solution. While helmets can provide some protection, they don’t prevent concussion.

Can Sippy-Cups Cause Speech Problems?

Sippy cups were created to act as a transitional tool for babies that are too old for bottles but who have not yet learned to drink from a regular cup. They are convenient for use and reduce spills to prevent major messes and many children successfully use sippy-cups with no adverse effects. Sippy cups have recently come under scrutiny as they can form habits that make a child difficult to understand when he/she begins to talk.

Children who use a sippy-cup after the age of 3 may have problems when their primary teeth erupt. These children may have an open bite, which occurs when the top and bottom teeth do not fit

Does there need to be a loss of consciousness for there to be a diagnosis of concussion?

No. This is a common myth. The confusion that occurs after a concussion can occur with or without loss of consciousness. The majority of concussions in sports occur without loss of consciousness and often go unrecognized.
10 Tips for a Happier Holiday Season!

'Tis the season for holiday parties, family get-togethers and – for a lot of kids – major meltdowns. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to set your child up for success.

1. Stick to your child’s schedule as much as possible. If your regular routine includes quiet afternoons, try to build in some down time when you’re on vacation.
2. When you’re on your way to an event, go over what to expect. Give your kids three good behaviors to remember – and then “catch them” doing something right.
3. If you’re spending the day at a relative’s home, scope out a quiet spot where your child can escape for a break. Be sure to pack a few favorite toys or books.
4. Don’t let well meaning relatives put a picky eater on the spot. Let them know you’re working on expanding your child’s repertoire – but that this meal is all about family time.
5. Role play appropriate responses for opening a gift or turning down a dish. Kids are notorious for being honest, and good manners aren’t always intuitive.
6. Be sensitive to sensory issues. Sitting on Santa’s lap at a crowded mall can be the perfect storm of sensory overload. Likewise, the smell of crispy latkes might be enough to put your child into overdrive. Consider changing traditions that aren’t a good fit.
7. When you can’t avoid a sensory situation, help your child cope. Keep earplugs or headphones handy for children who react to noise. Bring gloves for kids who balk at messy activities like decorating cookies.
8. Stay calm and carry on. You can’t always stop a meltdown from happening, but a calm, quiet response will help your child recover more quickly. Acknowledge that your child is feeling frustrated and offer coping strategies like taking deep breaths or counting to 10.
9. Just say no – at least sometimes. It’s tempting to pack your schedule to the brink, but you’ll enjoy the season more in moderation. Take a hard look at what events are mandatory and divide and conquer when necessary.
10. Take care of yourself too! Children feed off of our emotions, so keeping your own stress levels in check will go a long way toward happier holidays!

Try It at Home!

If your child has difficulty protruding his or her tongue, use envelopes and stickers. Even though stickers may already be sticky, demonstrate licking the sticker and putting it on the envelope. You can also save stickers and envelopes from junk mail, such as magazine stickers and decorate an envelope with them. Extend the activity to work on language development. The child can select the sticker and the parent can model the language, “That one,” or “The blue one.” Then ask, “Where should we put the sticker?” Help your child point to the spot on the envelope and say, “Right there!” Lick the back of the envelope and pretend to mail it or give it to someone special.

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When playing with your child, such as having a picnic, make sure you are using comments as well as questions. Children may feel as if they are being tested if the conversation from the adult goes like this: "What's that? What color is it? How many? What are you eating?” Instead, try for a more natural conversation by talking about what you are doing or what you see or what you like. The conversation may go more like this. "Mmmm, I like the sandwich. Your pie looks yummy! I have a blue plate. What do you want to eat? Look, my pie is all gone. Do you want a drink? Me,too.” Of course, in between your turn, you will be giving your child plenty of time to respond or initiate her part of the conversation. Have fun!