RECOVERING FROM MILD HEAD INJURY/CONCUSSION: A GUIDE FOR PATIENTS

Mild head injury/concussion is a relatively common injury, which typically occurs from a blow to the head during sports, an accident, a fall, or from blast exposure at close range. People often report being dazed or knocked unconscious for a short period of time from their injury. People also frequently report brief memory loss for events just before, during, or immediately following the injury. This is common and not a cause for concern. Although many people do not seek treatment after injury, it is common for people to present to the emergency room or to a military medic for evaluation.

Common Symptoms
You should not be alarmed if you have symptoms after mild head injury. Some symptoms are expected. As noted, feeling dazed, being knocked unconscious, or having amnesia for events that happened before or after the injury are very common indicators of mild head injury. Most patients will also have some temporary symptoms associated with their head injury that may persist for a short time after the injury. Common temporary symptoms may include headache, blurry or double vision, sensitivity to bright light, fatigue, reduced concentration or memory complaints, irritability, or other mood changes like depression or anxiety. Few patients will experience all postconcussive symptoms. Some of the symptoms you notice may actually have nothing to do with your head injury. The reason that the symptoms of PCS are so much like the normal signs of daily stress is that one main cause of these symptoms is exactly the same: everyday stress. In fact, deployment alone can lead to many of these same symptoms. PTSD, depression, sleep problems, and chronic pain can also contribute to these symptoms. A concussion adds more stress to your life in the period soon after injury, not just bumps and bruises to your head. The accident itself, being in the hospital, and going back to work and school are all things that add stress to most patients’ lives. Bills can pile up, time is lost, and there may be injuries to other parts of your body. And just like a pulled muscle or bruised leg, your brain takes some time to recover. You may have some trouble with work or school at first, and this may be stressful and frustrating, even though it is normal. Trying to do your regular work right after a head injury is like trying to run with a pulled muscle. You can’t see it, it may not be serious, but it takes some time to get better.

Duration of Symptoms
Most symptoms following a mild head injury/concussion resolve in a short period of time, from days, weeks, or up to a few months, even without treatment. Symptoms persisting longer than 3 to 6 months are quite rare following mild head injury. It is also important to keep in mind that postconcussive symptoms (e.g., headache, memory lapses) are experienced by all individuals from time to time in their daily lives, so one should not expect that recovery means a person will never experience these symptoms after head injury. Recovery is better defined as returning to your preinjury baseline.
**Treatment**

The goal of treatment is to help you understand the injury more thoroughly, develop appropriate appraisal of symptoms postinjury, and develop appropriate expectations about symptom resolution and recovery. Having accurate self-appraisals and appropriate expectations about recovery will help you manage symptoms much more effectively as you recover. Symptom management may include temporary lifestyle or behavioral changes or medications recommended or prescribed by your doctor. Treatment will ideally help you return to activities (e.g., work, exercise, school, etc.) in a timely manner. Your doctors and health care providers will work with you to help you manage your symptoms as you recover from your injury. They will tailor their recommendations based on your background (i.e., medical history) and current symptoms to help maximize your quality of life during your recovery and your return to activities such as work or school in a timely fashion.

**Follow-up**

Although follow-up in our clinic or referral to other specialists may be recommended to help monitor or manage symptoms, it is frequently not necessary. If it is felt that you do not need follow-up or referral for symptom management after your visit, we still encourage you to contact us in the future with any new questions or concerns. If your questions cannot be addressed with a phone call, we could see you back in our clinic if necessary or refer you to a provider that could best address your needs. Please call our Coordinator at 253-968-5906 if you have any questions or concerns about your recovery and would like to schedule a time to talk to a clinical provider.

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