

What is concussion?

Concussion is a disturbance of brain function caused by a direct or indirect force to the head. Concussion results in a temporary loss of brain function such as memory and thinking. Usually the changes are temporary and complete recovery is expected when treated correctly. Concussion does not involve structural damage or any permanent injury to the brain.

How common is concussion?

Concussion is common in sports that involve body contact, collision or high speed. Concussion is more common in children than any other age group- usually due to underdeveloped neck muscles and body control during trauma, head to neck ratio and brain cells and pathways that are still under development.

There is a difference in management between adults and children because:

Children's brains are still developing, are more easily concussed, experience more symptoms and take longer to recover.

Signs and symptoms of concussion:

Concussion can affect any area of the brain and signs and symptoms can vary depending on the affected area. It is important that any signs of concussion are reported on and any injury that may potentially cause concussion is reported using Waverley Gymnastics Centre Incident reporting system and contact of parents. If seizure activity (uncontrollable shaking of limbs, unresponsiveness, or wetting self) noted, or loss of consciousness then immediate medical attention should be sought.

What can be observed (visual):

Holding or clutching head

Slow to get up- appears stunned

Slow to verbally respond or Unresponsiveness – even briefly

Unsteady on feet/balance problems

Disorientation- confused about what is happening/can't recall events prior

Slow to respond to questions or instructions

Slurred speech

Moves clumsily

Shows mood, behavior or personality changes

Loss of consciousness (only seen in 10-20% of cases)

Upper limb muscle rigidity

What can be reported:

Headache or pressure in the head

Dizziness

Nausea/Vomiting

Neck Pain

Blurred or double vision

Balance problems or dizziness

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Confusion or memory loss
Sensitivity to light and/or noise
Feeling tired or drowsy – concentration or memory problems
Reduced ability to think clearly and process information: irritability
Feeling emotional
Not quite feeling right (feeling in a fog).

RED FLAGS:

If any of the below symptoms are displayed then immediate transfer to medical attention via ambulance should be sought:

-  Neck/spinal tenderness
-  Increased confusion/irritability
-  Repeated vomiting
-  Seizure or convulsion
-  Weakness or tingeling in arms or legs
-  Deteriorating conscious state
-  Severe or worsening headache
-  Unusual behavior
-  Double vision

Immediate Management:

[Any person with a suspected concussion must be withdrawn from training/competition immediately and require assessment by a medical doctor.](#)

Urgent transfer to hospital is required if the gymnast displays any of the following:

- Loss of consciousness or seizure
- Increasing confusion or irritability
- Deterioration after the injury (e.g an increase in drowsiness, headache or vomiting)
- Neck pain or spinal cord symptoms (e.g numbness, tingeling or weakness in arms and/or legs)

First steps:

1. Recognising the injury:
Check gymnast for visual or reportable signs.
2. Remove the gymnast from training/competition:
Adhere to general first aid rules: including airway, breathing, circulation and spinal immobilization.
The gymnast **must** be removed from activity immediately
The gymnast **must not** be allowed to return to training/competing on the same day.
3. Inform the gymnasts parents or guardians about the possibility of concussion and give them a fact sheet when having the incident report signed.
4. Refer the gymnast to a medical doctor for assessment:
All gymnasts with suspected concussion should have their parents notified and be referred to their local doctor for assessment.

Recovery:

In most cases recovery will occur within 10-14 days

Complications are uncommon however the risk of complications is increased by premature return to training due to:

- Higher risk of injury or repeated concussion
- Prolonged symptoms
- Depression and other mental health issues (irritability)
- Severe brain swelling.

Return to training:

The gymnast should not return to training until completely asymptomatic. If medical attention was sought then training cannot recommence until medically cleared. If any time off school is required due to memory and processing problems then sport cannot resume until successful return to school without worsening of symptoms.

For example:

- Rest until all symptoms resolve
- Light aerobic activity 24hrs after symptoms resolve
- Light non contact training
- Full contact training if no return of symptoms
- Return to full training
- If the gymnast redevelops symptoms at any stage then they should drop back to the last symptom free activity- retry to progress again after 24hrs of being asymptomatic.
- If symptoms continue to reappear after 10 days then re review by a medical doctor and clearance to restart training needs to be obtained.

Adapted from Sports medicine Australia (Department of Sports and Recreation) concussion policy and information.

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